CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

STRUCTURE

OF THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS;

AND ON THE PLANS OF

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

AGITATED AT THE PRESENT DAY.

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3. 160. 29.

ERRATA.

Page 15, line 22, for *ſecurity* read *protection*.
—— 25, l. 11, read *Edward* I.
—— 33, l. 28, for *jealouſly* read *jealouſy*.
—— 43, l. 24, for *beſides that, the* read *beſides that the*.
—— 46. l 5. The note of reference (*) ought to be placed after the word *republic*, l. 5, and not after the words *popular delegates*.
—— 60, l. 2, for *and above all engendering* read *and above all, by engendering*.
—— 60, l. 25, expunge the comma after *that*, the word *cauſes* referring to thoſe mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and not to any thing that follows.
—— 66 l. 27, for *power* read *right*.

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PREFACE.

THOUGH a Government may, without doubt, be ſo conſtituted as to unite the various advantages of monarchy, ariſtocracy, and democracy; yet, as the ingredients are of oppoſite qualities, it is obvious that their union can never be thus eminently beneficial, unleſs they are weighed out in their juſt proportions with the utmoſt nicety and exactneſs, and worked up together by the moſt ſkilful and delicate hand. If any one of them predominate, inſtead of ſerving to correct the other two, it will, neceſſarily, overpower and deſtroy their effect; and, if they are ill-combined, the mixture ſo far from operating on the political body, like a mild and ſalutary regimen, will naturally affect it like a violent and deſtructive poiſon, corrode and convulſe its frame, and probably, in the end, work its diſſolution. The peculiar

excellence therefore of the Britiſh conſtitution muſt be placed, not ſo much in the mere circumſtance of its uniting together theſe three ſpecies of government, as in its happy *mode* of combining them; and the firſt object of the politician ſhould certainly be, to diſcover an effectual way of maintaining that balance of power between the King, Lords, and Commons, which is ſo eſſential to the well-being of the State.

Theſe three orders ſeem to poſſeſs an effectual ſafeguard for their rights and privileges in that conſtitutional law, which has allotted to each a diſtinct voice in the legiſlature, and made its aſſent indiſpenſably neceſſary to the paſſing of all bills. But it is obvious, that this ſalutary proviſion would become altogether nugatory, was any one of them to gain ſuch an aſcendancy over the other two, as to render them ſubſervient to its views—were either the crown and nobility, for inſtance, on the one hand to become ſo far odious, or contemptible in the eyes of the third eſtate, as to be intimidated from exerciſing their right of negativing the reſolutions of the commons; or again, were the two houſes of parliament, on the other, to become dependent on the will of the ſovereign. Now as to the former caſe, experience may ſatisfy

us, that neither the dignity and authority of an hereditary peerage, nor the majeſty and power, which naturally attach themſelves to the executive magiſtrate, are ſingly ſufficient to check the uſurpations of popular ſuſpicion and violence; and that they can poſſeſs no ſolid ſecurity, unleſs they have an actual influence in the Houſe of Repreſentatives. On the other hand, it is obvious, that the two houſes of parliament can never be ſufficiently independent of the ſovereign, nor be calculated to anſwer the purpoſes of their inſtitution, unleſs the peerage be inacceſſible to all but men of fortune and reſpectability; and the ſtate of the repreſentation ſuch, as to attach the Houſe of Commons, firmly and unequivocally to the cauſe of liberty and the intereſts of the third eſtate. But many carry their notions upon this laſt head much farther; and, according to the theory, which they have formed to themſelves of the Britiſh legiſlature, conceive that the Lower Houſe of Parliament not only purports to be the guardian of that order, whoſe name it bears; but to repreſent it ſo fully and excluſively as to be, in the ſtricteſt and pureſt ſenſe of the words, the mere vehicle of its ſentiments, and organ of its voice. As thoſe, who hold this opinion, of courſe reprobate that influence, which the

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two higher branches of the legiſlature now have in that houſe, as both unconſtitutional in itſelf and pernicious in its tendency; the few following conſiderations may not perhaps be unworthy of their attention. They are deſigned to ſhew that ſuch an influence is, in a certain degree, not only ſalutary and beneficial in its effects; but alſo, in itſelf, perfectly compatible with the genuine principles of the Britiſh Conſtitution, and, in truth, eſſential to its very exiſtence. And the argument they afford goes to prove, on the one hand, that to reduce that influence at all below its preſent pitch, is, at leaſt, a meaſure of doubtful expediency; and on the other, that to deſtroy it altogether, or even to diminiſh it very materially, would probably lead to the moſt ruinous conſequences.

What that nice proportion of influence is, in which the well-being of our government requires, that the three diſtinct intereſts of the conſtitution ſhould be adjuſted in the Houſe of Commons, is certainly a queſtion not eaſy to be reſolved, though it depends merely upon fact and experience: but yet it is a queſtion, which in ſome meaſure deſerves the attention of every Britiſh ſubject, and ought ſurely to be weighed with a peculiar degree of care by every advocate for reform. The deciſion of

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it (ſo far as the Author is able to decide it) is the main object of the following enquiry; and the Reader is requeſted not to confound it unneceſſarily with another queſtion plainly diſtinct from it—viz. *How* ſuch a balance of influence may be beſt maintained? How far officers of the Crown ought to be admitted into the Houſe of Commons—what ſort of influence may be ſafely exerciſed at the election of its members—and again, how far the preſent regulations reſpecting polls deſerve praiſe or animadverſion, with other queſtions of a ſimilar import, are certainly of great moment; but they have no neceſſary connection with that, which the Author has ſtated above, nor does he, in fact, propoſe to meddle with them any farther than as they may be involved in a general examination of thoſe ſchemes of reform, which are ſo importunately urged at the preſent day. Let him not therefore be raſhly charged with ſtanding forward in ſupport of venality and corruption; or with ſo foul a deſign, as that of undermining all public virtue, and ſapping the foundations of our rights and liberties. His expreſs object is, to maintain the intereſts of true liberty; and being fully convinced that they can never be, ultimately, promoted by ſuch diſhonorable means, he reprobates

bates private bribery moſt decidedly and unequivocally, upon whatever occaſion it may be employed, and whatever form it may aſſume; whether it be concealed under the veil of a penſion, or be accompanied with every circumſtance of outward degradation, as he fears it is but too often practiſed at conteſted elections. But though he thinks that the penſion liſt ought to be appropriated excluſively to the purpoſe of rewarding paſt ſervices, of encouraging riſing merit, or relieving preſent diſtreſs; and never employed as a ſource of additional influence; he yet entertains a very different opinion of that important privilege, which the Conſtitution has placed in the hands of the King, of beſtowing offices and honours; he conceives it to have been ſo veſted, expreſsly, for the purpoſe of attaching the Servants of Government to the intereſts of the Executive Power, and giving it a greater degree of conſideration in the State: and in this point of view, unleſs it be carried to too great an extent, the influence accruing from it to the Crown muſt appear perfectly legitimate and conſtitutional. He further ſcruples not to acknowledge, that he conſiders that ſpecies of influence, which ſeveral individuals have acquired in different boroughs, as eſſentially

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different from that obtained by private bribery; it certainly does not imply the ſame depravity of mind, nor operate in the ſame way towards eradicating all principles of honor and public ſpirit. It is, in a word, rather a monopoly of the elective franchiſe itſelf, and a ſort of permanent property in the right of nominating Members of Parliament, than a temporary purchaſe of votes; and therefore, though with great reaſon an object of jealouſy to the politician, it demands his attention, not ſo much on account of any thing immoral in itſelf, as on account of its tendency to throw too great a weight of influence into the hands of certain individuals, and ultimately into thoſe of the ſovereign. Whether this influence has already exceeded its juſt bounds, the following conſiderations may, perhaps, help the Reader to determine; and he is again reminded, that it is foreign to the Author's purpoſe either to defend the preſent ſyſtem any farther than as it is calculated to produce that juſt balance of power, which is eſſential to the welfare of the country; or to oppoſe thoſe ſyſtems of innovation which have been propoſed, but as they tend to ſubvert and deſtroy it.

The arguments which he has to offer to the public, may, perhaps, have little of novelty in them: but he aims not at originality;

and his end will be fully anſwered, if he ſucceeds in placing the ſubject in a clear point of view. For this purpoſe, he has reduced the argument into a regular ſeries of propoſitions; and that too ſo conciſely, that the whole amounts to little more than a ſynopſis. From this brevity, another diſtinct and very important advantage will alſo accrue to the reader. He will run but little riſk of being miſled by a miſrepreſentation of facts, and be left more fully to the free exerciſe of his own judgment in determining upon the truth or fallacy of the deduction. The author has no other object in view than to promote the intereſts of true political liberty; and moſt ſincerely ſhould he lament, if any miſtake of his were to operate, even in the moſt inconſiderable degree, to its prejudice.

It may to ſome appear ſtrange, that he ſhould begin his deduction at a point ſo remote from the main object of his enquiry: but thoſe will hardly think it ſuperfluous to ſtate the primary objects of political aſſociation, who, like him, are convinced that the deluſion, which in the preſent day ſeems to faſcinate many of the moſt zealous votaries of political liberty, originates in miſconceptions reſpecting the very ſubſtance of that freedom

freedom, for which they contend. In a word, the means, by which political liberty is ſecured, ſeem to be confounded by them with that liberty itſelf; and a participation in the direction of public affairs, exerciſed either immediately by the ſubject, or mediately by his repreſentative, is, it ſhould ſeem, included by them in the very notion of freedom, and conſidered as one of its eſſential ingredients. As this extravagant opinion affords ample ſcope for the wildeſt and moſt indefinite ſpeculations on the ſubject of government; ſo is it calculated only to produce in the minds of the people a ſpirit of licentiouſneſs, and to ſap the very foundations of civil obedience. For the very firſt concluſion, that the ſubject is naturally led to draw from it, is obviouſly this—that he is no farther free, than as he has an active ſhare in the government of his country; and of courſe, that every law, which is paſſed without his conſent, is to him an act of tyranny. Thus will democracy and liberty appear to him ſynonimous terms; and Britiſh freedom be regarded by him only as a more tolerable degree of ſlavery. But ſurely political liberty can never thus conſiſt in the exerciſe of the powers of government; but ought with more propriety to be placed in ſomething

thing more immediately affecting ſocial intercourſe—in a word, in that *ſecurity* which peculiarly diſtinguiſhes political ſociety from a ſtate of nature, and which the controul of law can alone beſtow. In ſhort, the degree of freedom enjoyed under any government may be well eſtimated by the degree of protection, which it affords to perſon and property, without involving any other conſideration; and though it be equally true, that the ſubject never can be ſecure without ſome barrier interpoſed, as it were, between him and the attempts of tyranny—and ſuch is the influence which the people of Great Britain have in their Houſe of Commons; yet, it ought at the ſame time to be remembered, that this influence ſtill purports to be nothing more than a ſafeguard to our liberties, and is on no other account truly valuable; and that as it may become too weak to withſtand the encroachments of tyranny, ſo it may ſo far overgrow its juſt ſize as to become itſelf deſpotic, and thereby dangerous to thoſe very rights, which it was meant to protect.

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I. AS it was probably fear only, that originally led men to form themſelves into political ſocieties, and induced them, for their mutual defence and protection, to reſign part of their natural liberty, and ſubmit voluntarily to the controul of government: ſo the primary object of political aſſociation is certainly the ſecurity of the ſeveral members of the community. And as ſecurity will ever bring along with it all the benefits of ſocial and commercial intercourſe, where that intercourſe is not cramped by unneceſſary reſtraints; ſo wherever an equal and effectual protection is afforded to perſon and property, and that, without any farther abridgment of natural liberty,

liberty, than what the general ſecurity of the community requires; there the political union may be ſaid to be perfect, and the ſubject undoubtedly enjoys political liberty in its greateſt poſſible extent. So that, upon the whole, it may be laid down as a rule, that as political ſociety will on the one hand be undoubtedly more or leſs favourable to liberty, in proportion as it affords an equal and effectual protection to the perſons and property of its ſeveral members; ſo again, on the other, the ſubject who enjoys this protection will be the more free, the more fully he is, at the ſame time, left to the uſe of thoſe powers, which nature has given him.

But though, while we thus confine ourſelves to abſtract reaſoning, we can conſider ſecurity only as a negative advantage—as a mere exemption from danger; and ſhould therefore argue very erroneouſly, were we to eſtimate the liberty of the ſubject ſimply by the degree of ſecurity which he enjoys, without taking into the account the price at which he purchaſes it, or in other words, what portion of his natural liberty it coſts him: yet, in practice, our calculation would, without doubt, be ſufficiently accurate, were we to make that ſecurity our only rule or criterion. Every unneceſſary reſtraint impoſed

poſed on the exerciſe of our natural faculties, whether it reſpect manufactures, commerce, landed property, offices of emolument or honour, or any other object on which man can employ his capital, induſtry, or talents, (if it be even of no greater importance than his pleaſures) every ſuch reſtraint, I ſay, when not neceſſary to the ſupport of government, or not demanded by the public good, is plainly in ſome ſort arbitrary and tyrannical, and implies a neglect of the ſubject's welfare incompatible with a ſtrict attention to his ſecurity—in a word, the abſolute freedom or ſcope of action enjoyed by him will naturally bear a certain relation to the meaſure of this ſecurity. It may then be laid down as a maxim, with little danger of error, that the degree of political liberty enjoyed under any government, will ever be proportional to the degree of protection which it affords to perſon and property; and may therefore be appreciated by that ſecurity, without involving any other conſideration.

II. Now this political liberty depends, firſt, upon the conſtitution of the government to which the ſociety is ſubject; and ſecondly, upon the municipal laws and cuſtoms actually eſtabliſhed. How immediately and eſſentially

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it is influenced by the laſt mentioned cauſe, it can be hardly neceſſary to illuſtrate. Society has obviouſly, in different ſoils and climates, aſſumed a vaſt variety of forms and aſpects; in one country we ſee it formed upon a moſt equal and liberal ſyſtem of reciprocal accommodation, while in another it exhibits only a monſtrous picture of vaſſalage and tyranny; and hence the legal proviſions, whether eſtabliſhed by cuſtom, or enacted by the legiſlature, to which the ſubject muſt look up for the protection of his perſon and property, are under one government, either partial or inſufficient; while under another they are copious and effectual, and extend an equal ſhare of protection to all ranks and conditions.

But again, however favourable the eſtabliſhed laws may be to liberty, if the ſubject have not the power, as well as the right, to do, whatever they allow, or be at all conſtrained upon any occaſion to do what they forbid, he is ſtill ſo far inſecure; and this explains how much political liberty depends upon the nature of the government, to which the ſociety is ſubject. Indeed, the relation in which the ſubject ſtands to his governors, is of a ſtill more intimate and important kind than that which he bears to the exiſting laws; inaſmuch as

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the tyranny of the moſt unequal and oppreſſive laws is more tolerable than that of an arbitrary deſpot; the former operating in a certain known and uniform manner, while the latter has no other rule of action than his own will and caprice. But to define how far political liberty depends upon the nature of the government, it may, perhaps without impropriety, be laid down as a rule, that the conſtitution will be more or leſs free, in proportion, on the one hand, as it ſecures, by the impartial exerciſe of its ſeveral powers, the juſt operation of the eſtabliſhed laws and cuſtoms; and, on the other, as it has a natural tendency to adopt only ſuch new regulations as are calculated to benefit all the ſeveral orders of the community *equally*.

It is this laſt relation, (which political liberty bears to the laws of the Conſtitution) that we are alone concerned with in the preſent enquiry; and therefore the following propoſitions relate ſolely to it. Now,

III. The only powers exerciſed by government are, 1. The legiſlative power employed in making and abrogating laws; 2. The executive power, which manages all the concerns of the political body conſidered in its collective capacity, and regulates its inter-

courſe with Foreign States; and 3. The judiciary power, occupied in regulating the mutual concerns of the ſeveral individuals, that compoſe the community.

IV. Political liberty then, ſo far as it depends upon the conſtitution, muſt ariſe from ſuch a diſtribution and adjuſtment of theſe three powers, as will beſt ſecure their application to the general good of the community.

Now the firſt ſtep neceſſary to be taken towards the accompliſhment of this object ſeems to be plain and eaſy. It is obvious that no two of the powers juſt mentioned (much leſs all the three) can be ſafely intruſted to one man or one body of men; their union neceſſarily involves in it, or rather implies arbitrary power; and power will ever bring along with it a temptation to pervert and abuſe it. Common ſenſe therefore ſeems to ſuggeſt as the ground-work of the political edifice, that the three powers in queſtion ought to be lodged in ſeparate hands, and that too, in ſuch hands, that they may neceſſarily watch each other with an eye of jealouſy, and be naturally diſinclined to league together againſt the liberties of the community. Such a diſtribution ſeems, I ſay, to be in the firſt inſtance plainly neceſſary, in order to prevent the miſapplication of the powers of government; and

to render it effectual, thoſe who are inveſted with theſe powers, ſhould have each ſo much weight in the balance as to be able both to aſſert their own conſtitutional rights, and to check each other's encroachments.

Again it is no leſs obvious that while proviſion is thus made againſt the encroachments and abuſes of the powers in queſtion, equal care ſhould be taken that their mutual jealouſy and oppoſition may not counteract or impede them in their proper operations, and thus render government impotent and inefficient.

V. Such fundamental precautions would, I ſay, naturally ſuggeſt themſelves to the mind of the political theoriſt. But without wandering longer in the regions of ſpeculation, or trying how far ſuch a train of reaſoning would lead us, it may be ſafely aſſerted, that however ſucceſsful we might be in eſtabliſhing general principles, or however juſt our ſpeculative deductions from them might be (though even here we ſhould probably miſtake for our own diſcoveries, what were only the leſſons of hiſtory and experience), yet were we to proceed to put our theory in execution, and involve ourſelves in the minutiæ of practical detail, innumerable unforeſeen diffiulties would inevitably

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occur to mock all our foreſight and foil all our ſchemes.

Reaſon indeed, as well as experience, may teach us, that ſuch a work far exceeds the ſcope of human ſagacity and ingenuity; and that all our reaſonings, a priori, upon ſuch a ſubject muſt neceſſarily be in a great meaſure vain and uſeleſs. The various powers and motives of action in man conſtitute the wheels and ſprings of political government; and muſt be accurately appreciated and adjuſted, in order to produce that nice equilibrium, which is eſſential to the exiſtence of a free government. But alas! theſe are far too little underſtood by man himſelf, to be thus fitly arranged by human ſkill in the intricate fabric of ſo complicated a machine; and they will infallibly baffle the penetration and judgment of the moſt ſagacious theoriſt.

VI. Fact therefore and experience are our ſureſt guides in ſo arduous an undertaking, and can alone afford a ſolid preſumption, that any newly-erected government will produce the effects expected from it.

When, therefore, a ſyſtem already eſtabliſhed has been found to anſwer the ends of good government; when uniform experience has evinced the effectual protection afforded by it

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to perſon and property, and the ſubject has, in a word, enjoyed under it all the benefits of true political liberty, it muſt be extreme folly and temerity, or worſe, to alter or new-model ſuch a ſyſtem, and to riſk the welfare of a whole people upon the iſſue of an experiment.

VII. Now the celebrated Baron de Monteſquieu pays this remarkable tribute of praiſe to the Britiſh Conſtitution. One nation there is, ſays he, that has political liberty for the direct object of its conſtitution; let us examine the principles on which this liberty is founded; while we acknowledge their ſolidity, we ſhall ſee liberty reflected as it were in a mirror. He then proceeds to delineate the grand outlines of our conſtitution; and aided by the light, in which he has placed it, its excellency ſhines forth with irreſiſtible evidence.

If then we value the opinion of a writer, as remarkable for the manlineſs and liberality of his ſentiments as for his acute penetration and ſound judgment; or, if we are not inſenſible to thoſe eulogiums, which Britiſh liberty continually receives from all who are acquainted with it, and extorts even from its enemies, let us not be ourſelves wanting in its praiſe: let us rather, with honeſt pride and exultation, add our ſuffrage of applauſe to the general voice;

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and (what is of ſtill more importance), let us remain ſatisfied, that, ſo long as our conſtitution continues to be the envy and admiration of every other nation, not only its outlines and general plan muſt far excel any model, that can reaſonably be expected from the meditations of the moſt ingenious theoriſt, but that its conſtituent parts alſo, as it now ſtands, can, at the worſt, need but little reform or correction.

But ſtill, whatever attention may be due to the concurrent teſtimony of the world in general, the beſt and moſt deciſive evidence that can be given in favour of our conſtitution ſtill remains behind; and that is the experience of Engliſhmen themſelves.

If then we have felt the ſalutary influence of that conſtitution, and have under its protection enjoyed our perſonal liberty and property in full ſecurity; while we gratefully acknowledge our obligations to it, let us guard it with jealouſy, and defend it with zeal; let us prefer our own experience to all ſpeculative arguments, however ſpecious, and ſpurn that ſophiſtry which would give the lie to our own feelings.

VIII. Now with reſpect to the Conſtitution of the Houſe of Commons, which is the moſt intereſting feature of our Government, and peculiarly

peculiarly the ſubject of the preſent enquiry, it is an undoubted fact, that it never did nor ever could (from the mode of its election) repreſent either *fully* or *excluſively* the Commons of Great Britain*. For 1, Its members are choſen only by

* A perfect ſtranger to our hiſtory would naturally conclude from the language held by many Reformers of the preſent day on this ſubject, that ſociety had ſubſiſted in this iſland time out of mind, on the ſame liberal footing on which it now ſtands; had never acknowledged any greater inequality of condition than what we now ſee; and that the whole nation, having at ſome fixed aſſignable period adopted the preſent form of government, and allotted to each order in the ſtate a diſtinct voice in the legiſlature, had appropriated to the loweſt claſs of the community its peculiar repreſentative in the Houſe of Commons, and even gone ſo far as to adjuſt that repreſentative exactly to the then ſubſiſting ſtate of population. But, alas! every one knows that (not many centuries back) England, like every other European kingdom, exhibited only a miſerable picture of feudal tyranny, deſcending in a chain of rigid ſubordination from the meſne Lord down to the wretched ſerf; and that the Houſe of Commons, inſtead of forming originally a diſtinct branch of the legiſlature, had probably long no exiſtence at all; and, at laſt, owed its birth and growth not to any great public act of the whole nation, or to any acknowledged title in the people; but, in the firſt inſtance, to the ſelfiſh ambition of of an overbearing individual, and afterwards to the poverty and neceſſities of the ſovereign. Before the rebellious uſurpation of Leiceſter under Henry III. the great council of the nation conſiſted only of the immediate military tenants of the

by certain bodies of electors to whom the elective franchiſe has been from time to time im-

the Crown, i. e. of the prelates, barons, and knights. Their inferior vaſſals, though their tenure was military and honorable, held only a ſubordinate rank in the political ſcale, and were not admitted into the national councils. As to the villains or ruſtics who cultivated the land, and the tradeſmen who chiefly reſided in towns, and were dependent on their more powerful neighbours, ſuch a privilege in them was out of the queſtion. In 1258, the Earl of Leiceſter, who uſurped the whole power of the ſtate, under the pretext of redreſſing grievances, directed that four knights ſhould be choſen by each county, to attend the Parliament, and lay before it the ſtate of the nation. And in 1264, the ſame ſubject, by his own authority, aſſembled a Parliament at London upon a ſtill more democratic baſis: two knights from each county, two deputies from each borough, and ſome eccleſiaſtics, not immediate tenants of the Crown, were ſummoned to attend. This is by many eſteemed the epoch of the Houſe of Commons; and the new aſſembly certainly bore a ſtrong reſemblance to that Houſe, as it now ſtands. The lower claſſes of the ſtate, however, gained but little by this innovation. The repreſentatives from the counties were, in fact, only deputies from the ſmaller barons; and the meaſure of ſummoning repreſentatives from the boroughs being founded only on uſurpation, was diſcontinued in the ſubſequent Parliaments. The real origin of popular government in England muſt be ſought for in more ſolid cauſes, in the wants of the prince, and the increaſing importance of the cities and boroughs themſelves; and the true epoch of the Houſe of Commons may be more properly

referred

imparted; the qualifications alſo of the electors themſelves being different in different parts of the

referred to a later period. After the abolition of the feudal ſervices, many cauſes tended to render the royal revenues inſufficient for carrying on thoſe expenſive wars, in which the Crown was almoſt conſtantly engaged. Hence the Prince was obliged to have frequent recourſe to Parliament for ſupplies; and to levy heavy talliages upon the royal boroughs. As the latter, however, grew in power, he found it neceſſary to ſolicit that aid, which he uſed formerly to exact at his pleaſure; and this circumſtance induced Edward It in 1295, to ſummon deputies from ſeveral of the richeſt boroughs, in order to procure their aſſent to his demands with the greater eaſe. As the ſame cauſes continued to operate, new boroughs were erected from time to time in the following reigns; and the number of deputies was gradually increaſed. Theſe deputies, however, formed no part of the legiſlature. They met apart, both from the barons and the knights of the ſhires, who diſdained to mix with ſuch mean perſonages; and after having given their conſent to the taxes required of them, their buſineſs was finiſhed, and they were diſmiſſed. Inſtead of conſidering their attendance as an important privilege, they looked upon it as a burthen; and it was not till after they had repeatedly met together in the ſame aſſembly, that they begun to diſcover their importance as a political body, to petition for redreſs of grievances, in return for the ſupplies granted by them; and finally to aſſume a degree of legiſlative authority. In the reign of Henry IV. the King told the Commons that they were only petitioners. All judgment, ſays the record, belongs to the King and Lords.

the kingdom, and upon the whole multifarious and capricious. And 2, The Regal and Ariſtocratical

As the purpoſe for which theſe burgeſſes were aſſembled, was merely to grant ſupplies, ſo they were ſummoned only from ſuch cities and towns as were able and willing to relieve the King's neceſſities. The reſt ſent no repreſentatives at all; and even of thoſe, that uſually ſent deputies, the Sheriff ſometimes took the liberty of omitting particular boroughs in his return, when he could find no perſon in the place of wealth and abilities ſufficient for the office. And it was not till the reign of Richard II. that the Sheriffs were deprived of this extraordinary power. As to the inhabitants of the country, who formed the moſt numerous claſs in the State, they were perfectly at the diſpoſal of their Lords, and could not in the nature of the thing ſend any other repreſentative. Every ſupply that came from them, was not beſtowed immediately by themſelves; but wasthe gift of the Baron only, to whom they belonged. The Knights deputed by the counties repreſented (as has been already intimated) a different claſs of men; it was as much their intereſt originally to keep the poor ſerf in a ſtate of ſervile dependance, as it was to the Barons themſelves; they did not meet in the ſame chamber with the Burgeſſes, and it was not till the whole ſtructure and aſpect of ſociety had undergone a gradual change, that they became at all intimately connected with the lower claſſes of the community, and could be conſidered, with any propriety, as their protectors and repreſentatives. It was not till the cauſes, which gradually produced a partition of property, had, on the one hand, reduced the Knights and leſſer Barons, i. e. the gentry, to a rank much inferior to the great nobility; and on the other, till the growth of commerce had

tocratical parts of our Conſtitution have ever had, and even had at the era of the Revolution, a power-

had conſiderably augmented the private wealth and conſideration of the Burgeſſes, that it appeared in any way ſuitable to unite theſe two orders in the ſame Houſe, or poſſible to confound their rights and privileges. It does not appear, that they ever met together in the ſame aſſembly till the 16th of Edward III.—and of courſe it could not be before that period, that the country gentlemen condeſcended to appear as deputies for the boroughs, and to give up every proper mark of diſtinction. Such were the ſlow ſteps by which the third eſtate reached at laſt its preſent form; and ſuch originally the imperfect ſtructure of the Houſe of Commons, conſidered as its repreſentative. Nor was *equality* of repreſentation more incompatible with the ſtate of ſociety under the feudal ſyſtem, than *freedom* of election. As the original motive for ſummoning repreſentatives from the boroughs was merely to procure their aſſent to the impoſition of taxes, the Prince took good care not to admit any refractory members; he took upon himſelf to recommend fit perſons for the office; and there is an inſtance in the reign of Edward III. when the King named all the deputies. Nay, ſo late as the reign of Edward IV. the King wrote circular letters to the Sheriffs, at the ſuggeſtion of Northumberland, in which he not only enjoined them to inform the voters, that they were required to chooſe men of knowledge and experience for their repreſentatives; but expreſſed it as his pleaſure, that where the Privy Council, or any of its members, ſhould, on his behalf, recommend within their juriſdiction men of learning and wiſdom; in ſuch caſes their directions ſhould be followed, as tending to have

a powerful influence in the Lower Houſe of Parliament *. As on the one hand then the Houſe

the aſſembly compoſed of the perſons beſt fitted to give advice and good council. And what is ſtill more remarkable, this extraordinary meaſure was patiently ſubmitted to; and gave ſo little umbrage, that it has ſcarce been noticed by any hiſtorian. (Vide Hume's Hiſt.)

Such was the relation in which the Engliſh Houſe of Commons at firſt ſtood, in reſpect to its conſtituents and the ſovereign; and ſuch the unimportant rank, which it once held as a branch of the Parliament. This ſhort account of its origin may ſerve to ſhew how little countenance any reference to its firſt inſtitution can give to thoſe ſyſtems of repreſentation, which the advocates of reform think ſo eſſential to the well-being of the conſtitution. In truth, our anceſtors ſeem not to have indulged in any ſuch dreams of theoretic perfection; nor did it ever enter into their heads, that the liberties of the country could only be ſecured by a repreſentative adjuſted with arithmetical accuracy to the ſtate of population. When they became ſenſible of the vaſt importance of the Houſe of Commons, they ſaw, indeed, the neceſſity of preventing its ever becoming a tool in the hands of the ſovereign; and they therefore made many proviſions for eſtabliſhing the freedom of elections: but yet, in their ſimplicity, they thought that, in thus vindicating the independance of Parliament, they fulfilled their duty; and were abſurd enough to imagine, that the Commons of England had an adequate repreſentative, ſo long as the Lower Houſe was effectually attached to their intereſts.

* Shortly after William's acceſſion to the throne, ſeveral bills were brought forward in the Houſe purpoſely to retrench

Houſe of Commons never was in fact formed upon a ſyſtem of equal repreſentation, the reaſon

trench this influence. Of theſe ſome, that went to regulate elections, were paſſed into laws; but others, tending ſtill more directly to deprive the higher branches of the legiſlature of all participation in the deliberation of the Commons, were rejected. Of the latter, two in particular may deſerve to be mentioned. By one of theſe it was propoſed to exclude all placemen and penſioners out of Parliament; the other was the Triennial Bill of 1692, the avowed object of which was, to render the Commons independent of the Crown. But the ſtate of the public mind, at the period in queſtion, as deſcribed by hiſtorians, may ſufficiently evince, that the revolution produced no ſuch entire change in the conſtitution of the Houſe of Commons, as ſome ſeem to imagine. Many ſtill thought it only the engine of tyranny, and the greateſt apprehenſions were entertained by the people in general on account of that undue influence, which they thought bore down all oppoſition: ſo that the Triennial Bill, which was paſſed into a law in 1694, though inſignificant in compariſon of that propoſed in the year 1692, was received with as much joy, as if it had given a new birth to liberty. "It was hoped," ſays Rapine's Continuator, "that our conſtitution, particularly that part of it relating to the Houſe of Commons, "would recover its ſtrength and reputation, which was "now ſo much ſunk; for corruption was ſo generally "ſpread, that it was believed every thing was carried by "that method."

It may however, with good reaſon, be queſtioned how far theſe apprehenſions were well founded. The hiſtory of the times would probably lead the Reader to conſider the alarm,

that

ſon of the thing may ſufficiently convince us, that it ought not to be conſidered merely as an aſſembly of delegates, repreſenting each excluſively

that prevailed, rather as a relick of former fears, than as the natural conſequence of any preſent abuſe of the prerogative; and to look upon the clamours that were raiſed, rather as the ebullition of an extravagant ſpirit of freedom, than as the effect of a well founded jealouſy. This remark is in ſtrictneſs beſide our preſent purpoſe: if it be true, however, it will ſerve to add weight to the ſequel of the argument; and the Author thinks, that a ſimple ſtatement of the ſeveral conteſts, which William had with his Parliaments, would go far to ſubſtantiate it. It may be doubted, for inſtance, whether the Triennial Bill propoſed in 1692, and that againſt placemen, abovementioned, would not, had they paſſed into laws, have rendered the Houſe of Commons, in the end, abſolute, and the prerogatives of the Crown nugatory. The immediate effect of the one was certainly to deprive the King, in a great meaſure, of all controul over the Houſe, either as to its exiſtence, duration, or times of meeting; and the direct object of the other was to take away, as far as poſſible, all the influence, which he had in its deliberations. Yet, dangerous as theſe bills were to the prerogative, the King could make no effectual oppoſition to them in either Houſe, and was reduced to the invidious neceſſity of refuſing the royal aſſent. The uniform oppoſition, which William met with in almoſt all his meaſures, may be alſo here alledged as a general argument in ſupport of the above remark. By this he was conſtantly cramped and over-ruled in his operations; and we are told that it had ſuch an effect upon him, that he was at one time reſolved upon quitting the kingdom.

ſively a particular ſet of conſtituents; and on the other hand, if we may judge of the Britiſh Conſtitution by its uniform practice, it is equally plain from that admixture of intereſts which the Houſe of Commons has ever contained, that it cannot purport to repreſent ſolely and excluſively the popular part of the community ‡. So that if we would entertain juſt notions of this important branch of our Legiſlature, and regard either what its original conſtitution imports, or the ends which it has ever been calculated to anſwer; we muſt exclude the idea of *popular delegation* out of our definition, and conſider the Houſe of Commons ſimply

‡ It muſt be confeſſed, that both the exterior ſtructure of the Britiſh legiſlature, and the language of the conſtitution, according to which the Lower Houſe of Parliament is ſtiled "the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament aſſembled," naturally ſuggeſt the notion, that that Houſe ought to repreſent the people excluſively, and that too, fully and equally. But, ſurely, the true genius of the conſtitution ought to be collected not from its outward appearance, or mere letter, but from its uniform practice. It is from that practice that we have derived the bleſſings we enjoy, and it is the only thing that we are concerned to maintain. It may be further remarked, however, that ſo long as the Houſe of Commons is attached to the cauſe of the people, (which it undoubtedly ought to be) it is certainly, to all uſeful purpoſes, their organ, and may with ſtrict propriety be entitled their repreſentative.

ſimply as a Senate, the members of which are bound, individually, to conſult the intereſts not of particular diſtricts, but of the country at large; and to defend, not merely the privileges of their own body, but the principles of the Conſtitution in all its parts §. And from this view of it, it is plain, that, though none of its members repreſent any particular body of conſtituents, yet the whole aſſembly in its collective capacity, virtually and effectually, repreſents the whole Britiſh nation. It is called *emphatically* the Houſe of *Commons*, becauſe it is in a more peculiar manner its buſineſs to defend the rights of that part of the community, and to ſtand as a barrier againſt the encroachments of the Crown and Peers; and becauſe the popular influence ought, and does in fact preponderate in it.

Such

§ "Every Member, (ſays Blackſtone) though choſen by "one particular diſtrict, when elected and returned, ſerves "for the whole realm. For the end of his coming thither "is not particular, but general; not barely to advantage "his conſtituents, but the *commonwealth*; to adviſe his "Majeſty (as appears from the writ of ſummons) *de communi "conſilio ſuper negotiis quibuſdam arduis et urgentibus regem, "ſtatum et defenſionem regni Angliæ et eccleſiæ Anglicanæ con-"cernentibus.* And therefore he is not bound, like a De-"puty in the United Provinces, to conſult with, or take "advice of his conſtituents upon any particular point, "unleſs he himſelf thinks it proper or prudent ſo to do."

Such then is the real nature of the British Houſe of Commons, and ſuch the liberal and enlarged principles upon which it is formed. In compariſon of it, that ſyſtem of delegation, which would reſtrain each deputy to the partial conſideration of his conſtituents only, and bind him down to the mere letter of his inſtructions, appears narrow and contemptible; and how pernicious it will ever prove, when carried into execution, may be ſufficiently evinced from the hiſtories of Holland and Switzerland*. Yet it is hard to imagine, upon what other principle perfect equality of repreſentation ſhould be deemed eſſential to liberty, or even its peculiar expediency be candidly and effectually maintained. But it is foreign to the Author's purpoſe,

* In that ſyſtem of confederation, which ſubſiſts between the Seven United Provinces, each province ſends its committee of delegates to the States General: theſe delegates are diveſted of all diſcretionary power, and can neither propoſe nor acquieſce in any meaſure, which is not expreſsly mentioned in their inſtructions. The Helvetic confederation is of the ſame nature; the General Diet having no power to conſult for the general intereſts of the whole body, or to ſacrifice any partial intereſts for the ſake of the whole community. The imperfection of theſe two ſyſtems has been frequently experienced by both nations: yet unworthy motives of jealouſly and diſtruſt have hitherto prevented them from adopting a more liberal ſyſtem of union.

purpoſe, to enter here into the merits of any propoſed plan of reform. The only object, which he had in view, in this place, was to ſtate conciſely, what he conceives to be in fact the true nature of that branch of our Legiſlature, in favour of which he had before appealed, in a general way, to experience.

IX. From the preceding ſtatement, we may judge (by the way) how far thoſe bold ſchemes of reform, which aim at (what is called) a complete regeneration of Parliament, are founded upon *conſtitutional* principles; and, with what degree of juſtice, thoſe, who ſupport them, can lay claim to that zealous attachment to the Britiſh Conſtitution, upon which they profeſs to act. If what has been ſaid be true, it is obvious, that to new-model the Houſe of Commons upon any ſcheme of equal repreſentation, or to annihilate that influence, which the two higher branches of the Legiſlature now have in its deliberations, is not in effect to bring it back to its original condition, or to reſtore it to its primitive vigour and purity; but rather to re-conſtruct it upon a novel and adventurous theory of government.

Thoſe, therefore, who, in order to compaſs either of theſe objects, urge a more equal diſtribution of the elective franchiſe, and would intro-

introduce a right of univerſal ſuffrage, or at leaſt extend that privilege conſiderably beyond its preſent limits, cannot, with any degree of propriety, refer us back in ſupport of ſuch a meaſure to the firſt principles of our Conſtitution; but muſt, in candour, ſeek for ſome new ground of defence. In ſhort, their project, if it be indeed adviſeable, muſt recommend itſelf ſolely by its own intrinſic excellence: and thoſe, who are bold enough to propoſe it, ought in reaſon to produce clear and unanſwerable evidence of its expediency. What they propoſe, is nothing leſs, than to cut off from the political body a member (*eſſentially* at leaſt) of approved virtue, upon the plea of its having become degenerate and corrupt; it is ſurely then incumbent upon them to ſhew, that the one, which they would create and ſubſtitute in its ſtead, is at leaſt equally homogeneous to the general ſyſtem, and more fully competent to the dicharge of its proper functions. For ſhould any one be even diſpoſed to grant, that the Houſe of Commons has loſt its original energy, and become inadequate to the attainment of thoſe ends, for which it was inſtituted; he might ſtill be no leſs diſpoſed to object to the New Aſſembly of Repreſentatives, as equally adverſe in its nature, to the true and genuine

principles of our Conſtitution.—He might, for inſtance, think that maſs of republican influence, which it would introduce, juſt as diſproportionate to the other parts of our Legiſlature, as that ariſtocratical influence, which the Houſe of Commons now contains; or even think it ſtill more likely to engroſs and abſorb all the powers and functions of Government. It will probably appear, hereafter, that ſuch doubts and apprehenſions are not only reaſonable in themſelves, but fully countenanced and ſanctioned by the obvious tendency of the ſyſtem under conſideration. But what the Author here inſiſts upon is ſimply this, that that ſyſtem being indefenſible on *conſtitutional* grounds, and being, on account of the very magnitude and boldneſs of its deſign, ſufficient to alarm all, who are fearful of innovation (and ſurely when the welfare of a whole people is at ſtake, even the moſt groundleſs ſuſpicions may find an excuſe;) its peculiar merits ought to have been fully illuſtrated and enforced; and every prejudice, whether founded on ignorance or timidity, ought in reaſon to have been clearly obviated by the more courageous and enlightened diſciple of liberty. At any rate, it is certainly unreaſonable in him to expect, that an experiment ſo momentous in its conſe-

quences,

quences, ſhould be hazarded, ſimply on his recommendation, either through mere admiration of the beauty of equal repreſentation, or diſguſt at the deformity of undue influence.

X. But in vindication of the preſent Conſtitution of the Houſe of Commons, we might not only appeal to the unerring teſt of long experience, by which its utility is fully evinced; but ſatisfactory arguments, founded upon the reaſons of that utility, might without doubt be produced. If the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem has been, in fact, beneficial, it cannot, ſurely, be impoſſible to develope the peculiar cauſes, from which its ſalutary effects have flowed. To decide, however, upon ſuch grounds, how far the Houſe of Commons is calculated, in its preſent form, to promote the intereſts of political liberty, or, in other words, how far it is agreeable to the genuine ſpirit of the Britiſh Conſtitution, (for political liberty, as M. Monteſquieu remarks, is the avowed end of that Conſtitution;) it ought, without doubt, to be viewed in all its ſeveral relations, and ſtill more particularly in that, which it bears to the two higher branches of the Legiſlature. The relation, which the Houſe bears to the Commons of Great Britain, is undoubtedly of the moſt intimate and important kind. It is, in a word,

the

the conſtitutional guardian of our rights and liberties--the invaluable barrier, which the wiſdom and patriotiſm of our anceſtors have placed between us and tyranny; and it may be added, that no ſolid ſecurity can be had for its fulfilling theſe objects of its inſtitution, unleſs it be effectually attached by intereſt to the cauſe of the people. But yet, as the Houſe of Commons is not a ſolitary independent Senate, unconnected with any larger ſyſtem; but forms, in fact, only a conſtituent part of the legiſlative body, the relation, in which it ſtands to the other members of that body, becomes, undoubtedly an eſſential object of conſideration. It is in this capacity, that it muſt exert itſelf, even in the cauſe of freedom; and under this character, the ſubject muſt look up to it for protection. If then it be diſproportioned or ill-adjuſted to the other parts of the general ſyſtem, as it can never contribute to the ends of good government; ſoit is impoſſible, that it ſhould promote, eventually, the intereſts of true political liberty. Important, however, as the relation is, which the Houſe of Commons thus bears to the two higher branches of the Legiſlature; it ſeems to be but ſuperficially attended to by the advocates of reform—even by thoſe, who are ſincerely attached to the Britiſh Conſtitution,

Conſtitution. Intent upon obtaining effectual ſecurity for the rights of the ſubject, they ſeem to overlook every conſideration not *immediately* connected with their darling object. The Houſe of Commons preſents itſelf to their view, only as it is the conſtitutional guardian of thoſe rights; and they ſuſpect not, that it can, poſſibly, be devoted too warmly to the cauſe of the people.

It muſt be confeſſed, indeed, that the leading features of our Legiſlature ſeem, at firſt ſight, to countenance ſuch an opinion; and it is probable, that a tranſient ſurvey of its ſtructure has more than once given riſe to it. It may be ſaid, that the two higher orders of the ſtate poſſeſs, each, a diſtinct ſhare in the buſineſs of legiſlation—the one in the perſon of the ſovereign, the other in the Houſe of Lords; and that it, therefore, ſtands but to reaſon, that the third eſtate ſhould have its excluſive and appropriate repreſentative in the Houſe of Commons:—that every admixture of influence is therefore naturally foreign to the genius of that aſſembly, deſtroys the ſymmetry of the whole ſyſtem of legiſlation, and militates directly againſt the fundamental principles of the Conſtitution.

That it is not, however, in reality, thus intrinſically

trinſically, *unconſtitutional*, is ſufficiently evident from what has been already ſtated reſpecting the origin of the Lower Houſe, and the nature of the duties impoſed upon its members. It appears, that the Crown and Peers have, almoſt invariably, poſſeſſed a powerful intereſt within the walls of that Houſe, ever ſince its firſt inſtitution; and that its members are bound to promote, not merely the intereſts of the third eſtate, but the welfare of the kingdom at large; nay, if we may form our opinion of the Conſtitution from what it has been in practice ever ſince the revolution, we ſhould naturally conclude, that the Houſe of Commons was deſigned to expreſs the united ſenſe of the whole Legiſlature; and, that the negative voice, with which the two higher branches are inveſted, was provided merely as an extraordinary remedy, to be applied only in caſes of extremity.

As to the *propriety* of ſuch a diſpoſition, a little reflection on the ſtructure and operations of the Legiſlature may ſuffice to convince the Reader, that it is not only uſeful; but eſſential to the tranquillity and ſafety of the State.

It is in the Houſe of Commons, that almoſt all meaſures of general and national concern, take their riſe. Upon the ſuppoſition, therefore, that the ſenſe of the whole Legiſlature is ex-

preſſed

by the majority of that aſſembly, the fate of every bill will be, at once, virtually decided by the reception that it there meets with; and every reſolution, that has been ſtamped with its approbation, will, generally ſpeaking, receive the aſſent of the crown and peers, as a matter of courſe. So far, therefore, as the influence complained of tends to accelerate the diſpatch of public buſineſs, by precluding the neceſſity of that minute inveſtigation on the part of the two higher branches of parliament, which the ſafety of the conſtitution would otherwiſe render indiſpenſably neceſſary, its effect is, certainly, highly beneficial; and it ſhould ſeem, that it cannot be annihilated without ſenſibly retarding all the operations of the legiſlative body, and rendering them proportionally feeble and ineffectual.

But this is the leaſt evil which would attend ſuch a diſunion. As every motion, which is made in the lower houſe, there receives a full and able diſcuſſion, it is not likely, that the expediency of ſuch meaſures, as have been ſanctioned by its approbation, ſhould, almoſt in any caſe, be queſtioned without doors. The King and Peers, therefore, can hardly, upon any occaſion, exerciſe that negative voice with which they are conſtitutionally inveſted, without

appearing to oppoſe the general intereſts of the country, and of courſe incurring a conſiderable degree of popular odium. Such has, in fact, been the caſe, whenever this right has been really exerciſed by the crown *. Now, was the Houſe of Commons conceived to be excluſively devoted to the cauſe of the people, it is obvious, that the exerciſe of the right in queſtion would be rendered ſtill more invidious; inaſmuch as it would be certainly more ſuſpected. In ſhort, was the Houſe of Commons what reformers wiſh it to be, at the ſame time that the prerogatives of the crown would be continually expoſed to the aſſaults of an aſſembly decidedly adverſe to the very appearance of monarchy, it would be hardly poſſible for the King to oppoſe its reſolutions,

* After mentioning the failure of the Triennial Bill, in 1692, Rapin's Continuator remarks, that "the rejecting a "bill, though an unqueſtionable right in the crown, has "been ſo ſeldom practiſed, that the two houſes are apt to "think it a hardſhip when there is a bill denied." Though this bill was highly dangerous to the rightful power of the crown, yet William could not refuſe his aſſent to it, without irritating the Commons to a very great degree; and we may judge of the ill-humour that prevailed upon this occaſion without doors, by the joy that was every where ſhewn, when the Triennial Bill of 1694, (though of a very different complexion from the former) received the royal aſſent.

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(however injurious they might be to his moſt eſſential intereſts,) without rendering himſelf obnoxious to the reproaches of all his ſubjects. Under ſuch circumſtances, the negative voice intruſted to the crown, would plainly become nugatory; and the very exiſtence of that mixed government, under which England has ſo long flouriſhed, would, in all probability, be left at the mercy of ſome factious demagogue *.

It

* It may be worth while, in this place, to lay before the reader the opinion of a celebrated writer on the ſubject of that influence, which the crown and peers poſſeſs in the lower houſe of parliament.

"The ſhare of power allotted by our conſtitution to the "Houſe of Commons, (ſays Hume, in his Eſſay on the In- "dependency of Parliament) is ſo great, that it abſolutely "commands all the other parts of the government. The "king's legiſlative power is plainly no proper check to it. "For though the king has a negative in the paſſing of "laws, yet this, in fact, is eſteemed of ſo little moment, "that whatever is voted by the two houſes, is always ſure "to be paſſed into a law, and the royal aſſent is little better "than a mere form. The principal weight of the crown "lies in the executive power. But, beſides that, the exe- "cutive power, in every government, is altogether ſubordi- "nate to the legiſlative; beſides this, I ſay, the exerciſe of "this power requires an immenſe expence, and the Com- "mons have aſſumed to themſelves the ſole power of diſ- "poſing of public money. How eaſy, therefore, would it "be for that houſe to wreſt from the crown all theſe

 "powers,

It ſhould ſeem then as if it were to that very influence, which the advocates of reform repro-

" powers, one after another, by making every grant of mo-
" ney conditional, and chooſing their time ſo well, that
" their refuſal of ſubſidies ſhould only diſtreſs the govern-
" ment, without giving foreign powers any advantage over
" us. Did the houſe of commons depend in the ſame
" manner on the king, and had none of the members any
" property but from his gift; would not he command all
" their reſolutions, and be from that moment abſolute?
" As to the houſe of lords, they are a very powerful ſup-
" port to the crown, as long as they are in their turn, ſup-
" ported by it; but both experience and reaſon ſhew us,
" that they have no force, nor authority, ſufficient to main-
" tain themſelves alone without ſuch ſupport.

" By what means, then, is this member of our conſtitu-
" tion confined within the proper limits; ſince, from our
" very conſtitution, it muſt neceſſarily have as much power
" as it demands, and can only be confined by itſelf? How
" is its moderation to be reconciled with the natural ambi-
" tion of man? I anſwer, That the intereſt of the body,
" is here reſtrained by the intereſt of the individuals; and
" that the houſe of commons ſtretches not its power, becauſe
" ſuch an uſurpation would be contrary to the intereſt of the
" majority of its members. The crown has ſo many offices at
" its diſpoſal, that when aſſiſted by the honeſt and diſinter-
" eſted part of the houſe, it will always command the reſo-
" lutions of the whole; ſo far at leaſt, as to preſerve the
" ancient conſtitution from danger. We may, therefore,
" give to this influence what name we pleaſe; we may call
" it by the invidious appellations of *corruption* and *dependence*;
" but ſome degree, and ſome kind of it, are inſeperable
" from the very nature of the conſtitution, and neceſſary to
" the preſervation of our mixed government."

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bate ſo loudly as ſubverſive of the conſtitution, that that conſtitution has, in reality, owed both its efficacy and ſtability. By removing the conflict between the ſeveral oppoſite and jarring intereſts of the ſtate, as it were, out of ſight, and confining the conteſt to the Members of the Houſe of Commons, it at once gives the appearance of unanimity and harmony to the Legiſlature, and ſtamps all its reſolutions with the ſeal of public utility. And again, by concentrating the actions of its various powers, it produces a degree of energy and diſpatch, which would in vain be expected, were thoſe powers to act ſeparately and ſucceſſively. In a word, without impairing the ſecurity of the ſubject, it gives to the executive power all the vigour and ſtability that it can poſſeſs under the moſt abſolute government.

XI. If ſuch then be the ſalutary effects of that influence, which the crown and ariſtocracy now have in the Houſe of Commons; and ſuch the probable, nay (the complexion of the times may warrant us in ſaying) certain conſequences of extinguiſhing it; with what jealouſy ought we to guard againſt every project of innovation, and with what fervor deprecate thoſe adventurous, if not inſidious ſyſtems of reform, which are ſo loudly urged at the preſent

preſent day. The very title, which the advocates of parliamentary regeneration (as they are pleaſed to call it), aſſume to themſelves, may juſtly excite a ſuſpicion, that their ultimate object is nothing leſs than a Republic; and in truth the meaſures, recommended by them, would but too certainly lead to that end. As they ſtile themſelves emphatically the friends (not of the Conſtitution, but) of the *people*; ſo the avowed ſcope of their project is, to tranſform the Houſe of Commons, as nearly as poſſible, into an aſſembly of popular delegates *.

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* Did not their very profeſſions clearly announce this to be the real drift of their deſigns; the means, which, they employ to accompliſh them, would place the matter without all doubt; as they are perfectly incompatible with the genius of our Government, and can be juſtified only upon the moſt democratic principles. Theſe friends of the people are not contented with laying their complaints before Parliament, but by the moſt clamorous and importunate appeals to the people at large, endeavour to rouſe them to an actual interference in the affairs of Government. Far be it from the author to call in queſtion that ſacred privilege of the people to petition for redreſs of grievances, and even to reſiſt oppreſſion by force in caſes of extreme emergency. He only maintains, that the people ought to be left to themſelves to judge, when they are oppreſſed; and not be exaſperated by an inſidious and exaggerated picture of ideal grievances, which they neither feel nor underſtand the

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This ſtep (for it is acknowledged to be preparatory only to a more enlarged ſyſtem of reform) they maintain to be indiſpenſably neceſſary at the very outſet, in order to reſolve the legiſlature not only in form, but in effect into its three

nature of. For, let him aſk what thoſe grievances and oppreſſions are which are invidiouſly called "ſcandalous violations of the acknowledged privileges of the people." Has property been arbitrarily invaded, or perſonal ſecurity been ſported with? No—both have hitherto enjoyed ample protection under the preſent ſyſtem, corrupt as it is: but theſe enlightened reformers have diſcovered, that a daring inſult has been offered to the Conſtitution of theſe realms in the uſurpations which have been made upon the freedom of elections; and are confident, though there has been as yet but little ground for complaint, that the time is not far diſtant, when men will be compelled to feel, that Liberty and Property are no longer ſecure. The author aſſerts not, that ſuch uſurpations ſhould be regarded with indifference; he is, on the other hand, of opinion, that they ought to be watched with the utmoſt jealouſy. He only laments that a mode of redreſs, which ſhould be applied only in caſes of extremity, has been recurred to, before any ſingle inſtance of actual oppreſſion has been experienced; and that, through the inceſſant appeals that are made to the people on the ſubject of equal repreſentation, the loweſt claſſes are led to think themſeves deſpoiled of rights, which they never enjoyed, and their minds filled with notions of a ſort of claim to perſonal influence in ſtate matters, which are totally incompatible with the genius of a limitted monarchy, and being of the moſt indefinite and licentious nature, are calculated only to ſubvert all order, and to introduce the moſt outrageous anarchy.

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diſtinct branches; and to reſtore each to that ſtate of independance, which is implied in the very ſtructure of the Britiſh Parliament. How much however they either miſunderſtand or miſrepreſent the true nature of that ſtructure, is ſufficiently apparent (as the author conceives), from what has already been advanced: and if the reaſoning urged in the preceding ſection be concluſive, the ſyſtem of legiſlation, propoſed by them, would be no leſs pernicious, than it is novel and unconſtitutional. That ſtate of diſunion and variance, to which it would reduce the members of the legiſlative body, would not only fetter and impede all its operations; and of courſe render the meaſures of adminiſtration proportionally feeble and inconſiſtent; but, what is infinitely worſe, by creating a new power at once inimical and diſproportioned to the other parts of the ſyſtem, it would give birth to an unſeemly conflict, that could hardly fail to end in the worſt of all tyrannies, that of a popular faction. Nor do theſe concluſions reſt ſolely upon the ſtrength of abſtract reaſoning; ſo far as hiſtory affords us examples, they ſeem to be fully ſanctioned by the infallible teſtimony of experience.

The fate of that Conſtitution, which exhauſted the labours of the firſt *National Aſſembly* of France,

France, affords an awful proof of their truth. That Conſtitution in many of it's moſt prominent features reſembled that of this country; and in whatever contempt the new legiſlators affected to hold the wiſdom and experience of all former ages, the beſt part of their political code was undoubtedly formed upon the model of the Britiſh Conſtitution. Indeed the difference ſeems to have conſiſted not ſo much in the nature of the conſtituted authorities themſelves, as in the means adopted for giving them effect. It is in this reſpect chiefly, that the new conſtitution was ill-contrived; and the miſchievous conſequences of the defect illuſtrate and evince in the ſtrongeſt manner the neceſſity of thoſe proviſions, which it is the firſt object of reformers in this country to remove.

The new Conſtitution was intended, like that of England, to unite all the peculiar advantages of Monarchy, Ariſtocracy, and Democracy. The executive power was placed in the hands of an individual; the crown was made hereditary, and the perſon of the king declared ſacred and inviolable. The legiſlative power was lodged in an aſſembly of deputies, purporting to repreſent every intereſt in the ſtate; the ſovereign being at the ſame time entruſted with a

negative voice upon it's reſolutions, as well to correct the effect of precipitation or intrigue, as to give permanence and ſecurity to the royal prerogatives.

Such were the main outlines of the new Conſtitution, ſuch the chief ſprings, which were to put the political machine in motion; and had it's interior mechaniſm been calculated to anſwer the purpoſes, which the artiſts profeſſed to have in view; it would have reflected immortal honour upon them. But alas! however fair the new fabric might appear to the eye of a ſuperficial obſerver, its workmanſhip was inſidious and deceitful; and the new legiſlators conſtructed their work in ſuch a manner, as to afford juſt ground for ſupecting both their ſkill and honeſty. In a word, the higher orders of the ſtate were intruſted with far too little influence under the new ſyſtem: and for want of real authority, they were effectually diſqualified from exerciſing that ſhare in the legiſlature, with which they were nominally inveſted. The firſt and moſt important error committed in this reſpect, was the conſolidating of the three eſtates into one maſs; and upon this occaſion it was, that the deputies of the commons diſcovered the firſt ſymptoms of their intemperate zeal. The

wiſe and moderate propoſition recommended by the Committee of Conſtitution, for eſtabliſhing a Senate upon the model of the American Senate, or rather of the Engliſh Houſe of Lords, to be intruſted with a negative upon the proceedings of the Houſe of Repreſentatives, was rejected with the utmoſt diſdain by a conſiderable majority. Thus were the two higher orders virtually excluded from that intermediate ſtation, which naturally diſpoſes and qualifies them to mediate between the ſovereign and the people; and which, according to the celebrated Monteſquieu, is eſſential to the very being of all moderate governments, as affording the only barrier calculated to check at the ſame time the aſſaults of deſpotiſm on the one hand, and the inroads of popular licentiouſneſs on the other.*

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* Our own hiſtory affords a ſtrong, but melancholy teſtimony to the truth of this obſervation, in recording the progreſs and iſſue of that long and memorable conteſt, which Charles I. had with his Parliaments. Had the peers, at that period, poſſeſſed their juſt and wholeſome degree of influence in the legiſlature; by wiſely oppoſing the oppreſſive uſurpations of the prince, and curbing the intemperate zeal of the commons, they might probably have ſaved the life of their Sovereign, have prevented the fall of the Conſtitution, and reſcued their country from the tyranny of a military faction. But unfortunately for the nation, this important branch of

This fundamental defect in the French Conſtitution was then, as might be expected, the chief cauſe of it's diſſolution; and undoubtedly contributed more than any other to the miſchiefs that enſued. But yet it is plain, that this cauſe could operate only through the medium of

the legiſlature had been long rapidly loſing that high authority in the ſtate, which it had once poſſeſſed; and it happened by a ſort of fatality, that, almoſt at the very outſet of the diſpute between the crown and commons, the moſt reſpectable of it's members had, through diſguſt and reſentment at the violent proceedings of the latter, imprudently quitted their ſeats, in order to follow the perſon of the king; and thus deſerted the only poſt, at which they were either likely to repel with ſucceſs the impetuous aſſaults of the Independants or to afford any effectual ſupport to the tottering power of the crown. So that, when the conflict was approaching to a criſis the aſſembly was rather the ſhadow than the ſubſtance of that illuſtrious body, which had once filled the Upper Houſe; and ſo far from holding the balance of the Conſtitution, or being able to ſtem that torrent of Republicaniſm, which was upon the point of overwhelming the ſtate, it had far too little influence with either party to aſſume even the character of a mediator with effect, or to allay the ſtorm by conciliatory meaſures. After the king's captivity, it became altogether contemptible; and few members would ſubmit to the mortification of attending it. When the important vote, paſſed by the Commons for trying the king, was preſented for its concurrence, it was indeed unuſually full; and, as if ſhocked and aſtoniſhed at the ferocity

of ſome faction predominant in the Aſſembly of Repreſentatives; and however certain it was to prove fatal in the end, it could have produced no immediate effect, had the different intereſts of the ſtate been properly poiſed in that aſſembly. In ſhort, had the crown and ariſtocracy

city of the meaſure, though not difficult to be foreſeen, it ſeemed eager to avert, if poſſible, the effects of it's former ſupineſs. Without one diſſenting voice, and almoſt without deliberation, the vote of the Lower Houſe was rejected with horror; aud the aſſembly adjourned itſelf for ten days. But the ſeaſon for effectual oppoſition was now paſſed; and the Commons were not to be ſtopped by ſo ſmall an obſtacle. Having firſt eſtabliſhed a principle, which is noble in itſelf, and ſeems ſpecious, but is belied by all hiſtory and experience, *that the people are the origin of all juſt power*; they likewiſe declared, that the commons of England aſſembled in Parliament, being choſen by the people, and repreſenting them, have the ſupreme authority of the nation, and that whatever is enacted and declared law by the Commons, hath the force of law, without the conſent of King or Houſe of Peers. The ordinance for the trial of Charles Stuart, was then again read and unanimouſly aſſented to. (Vid. Hume's Hiſt.)

In fine, the iſſue of this memorable conteſt between privilege and prerogative ſeems to prove inconteſtibly, no leſs than the ſimilar events, which have lately occurred in France, that no mixed government, partly Monarchical and partly Democratical, can be ſufficiently guarded againſt the fatal effects of popular ſuſpicion and licentiouſneſs, unleſs it

be

ariſtocracy been better able to cope with the democratic party, the fate of the conſtitution would have been at leaſt ſuſpended for ſome time longer; that violent ſpirit of innovation, which overwhelmed indiſcriminately every part of the old ſyſtem, whether objectionable or not, might perhaps have in the interim ſubſided; and the French Nation poſſibly have enjoyed at this moment the bleſſings of ſecurity under the protection of a moderate government. But alas! here the ſad deſtiny of Louis again prevailed; and as he neglected to exert his authority in the firſt inſtance, when the queſtion of ſeparate chambers was agitated, ſo when it was at laſt decided in favor of the tiers état, he ſaw too late, that by his facility in granting it a double number of repreſentatives he had compleatly loſt all aſcendancy in the Aſſembly; and reſigned the only

be cemented by ſome intermediate power, like that of the Peerage.

And as both revolutions ſufficiently evince, that ſuch a middle claſs of men is neceſſary to curb the uſurpations of the people; ſo on the other hand, the condition of the Houſe of Commons under the Protector, may ſerve to ſhew, how neceſſary it is, in order to obviate the conſequences of too powerful an influence on the part of the crown; and to correct, by that ſpirit of Independance, which it's condition naturally begets, the miſchievous effects of a venal repreſentative.

only barrier, which he had to oppoſe to the uſurpations of the popular deputies. The effect of this fatal overſight was ſuch as might have been expected, and became immediately viſible. The democratic party carried every thing by dint of numbers and force; and in a ſhort time the Clergy and Nobleſſe were not only annihilated as a diſtinct branch of the legiſlature, but ſtripped of every honorary title or privilege that could diſtinguiſh them from the reſt of the Community, ſcouted and inſulted by their new aſſociates in the National Aſſembly, rendered odious and contemptible to the Nation at large, and in the end by violence and proſcription driven out of the kingdom. Thus was the king left, ſingly and unſupported to maintain his prerogatives againſt a Phalanx of ſuſpicious and ambitious demagogues. The iſſue of ſo unequal a conteſt could not but be fatal to Monarchy; and, in effect, a ſhort trial was fully ſufficient to convince Louis, that, while he was nominally inveſted with an important ſhare of the legiſlative, and with every branch of the executive power, he was in truth but mocked with the inſignia of royalty, and his participation in the government only an empty privilege. As all his intentions, however benevolent, were liable to be perverted and miſconſtrued

ſtrued either through artifice or diſtruſt, ſo, being deſtitute of all ſolid authority, every ſingle exertion of thoſe powers, with which he was conſtitutionally inveſted, was attended with the utmoſt danger; and, in effect, all his caution was inſufficient to guard him againſt the effects of malice and miſrepreſentation. After ſeizing the opportunity afforded by the melancholy events of the 10th of Auguſt, to drag him by violence from the throne; his adverſaries, firſt in open violation of every principle of juſtice, arrogated to themſelves the incompatible functions of judge and accuſer; then, in direct contradiction to that article of their political code, by which the perſon of the ſovereign was declared ſacred and inviolable, they arbitrarily and perfidiouſly forced him to appear as a culprit before their ſelf-erected tribunal; and, laſtly, with every circumſtance of informality and injuſtice, condemned him to death, chiefly for the exerciſe of thoſe very powers, which they had themſelves placed in his hands. In ſhort, the hiſtory of the French Revolution, from it's commencement in 1789 to it's termination in the murder of the King, affords an aweful leſſon to the World on the conſequences of introducing Democratic principles into an extenſive empire; and ſeems fully to warrant

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the concluſion that the author would draw from it, viz. that a numerous popular aſſembly is altogether incompatible with the genius of a mixed government.

The conſtitution adopted by the confederated ſtates of America, on account of its reſemblance to our own, may alſo afford ground for analogical reaſoning; and it certainly ought not to be paſſed by unnoticed in this place, both becauſe it may appear to the reader to exhibit an evident exception to the maxim juſt laid down, and becauſe there is not perhaps another parallel caſe to be met with in the page of univerſal hiſtory. The Preſident, Senate, and Houſe of Repreſentatives, of which the American Congreſs conſiſts, anſwer preciſely to the three conſtituent parts of the Britiſh Parliament, with this difference, that the latter is built upon a much more democratic baſis than our Houſe of Commons, and the two former, though inveſted with ſimilar functions, are intruſted with much leſs power than what the crown and peers enjoy in our legiſlature. The preſident is elective and temporary, and poſſeſſes only a power of ſuſpending, not of abſolutely negativing, the reſolutions of the two houſes; the ſenate in like manner is compoſed not of an hereditary peerage, but of deputies elected only for a time; and

laſtly, the elective franchiſe is adjuſted with conſiderable accuracy to the ſtate of population, and the elections laid open, as far as poſſible, to every candidate. The experienced ſtability of this conſtitution, it may therefore be ſaid, clearly evinces the fallacy of thoſe objections, which have been alleged above to ſuch a ſyſtem of repreſentation; and the firm ſecurity, which it gives to civil liberty, may be further urged as an ample juſtification of thoſe attempts, which our advocates for reform are continually making, to introduce a ſimilar ſyſtem into this country. On this account the author will briefly offer to the reader's conſideration a few general remarks, tending to ſhew on the one hand, that the experience, which the American colonies have hitherto had of their new conſtitution, inſtead of counterpoiſing or invalidating the argument drawn from the French revolution, in reality ſerves only to countenance and confirm it; and on the other hand, that the ſtate of ſociety in America is ſo eſſentially different from what it is in this country, that that experience, whatever it may be, can hardly help us at all to judge of the probable conſequences of grafting a houſe of repreſentatives like the American, upon the Britiſh legiſlature.

That ſuch a difference of circumſtances really

ally exiſts, no one can doubt, who will be at the pains to take a comparative view of the two countries in reſpect to population, manufactures, and commerce; and will conſider at the ſame time, in how many ways theſe ſources of national wealth and ſtrength contribute to encreaſe the difficulties of government, not only by preſenting every day new objects of legiſlation, but by rendering the ſubjects themſelves more turbulent and unmanageable.

The riches of a ſtate may, it is true, be well eſtimated by the number of its inhabitants; but it is certainly not ſo with the condition of the ſeveral individuals of which it conſiſts, particularly the induſtrious and laborious part of the community. The increaſe of population has a natural tendency to render the labour of each leſs neceſſary to the public, and of courſe to diminiſh the price of it proportionably. And as it thus augments in two ways the difficulties of the labouring poor; ſo by increaſing continually the crowd of complainants, it gives riſe to that mutual interchange of diſcontent, which is the parent of turbulence and ſedition. Commerce and manufactures have obviouſly a direct tendency to aſſiſt this intercourſe, by obliging men to aſſociate together in large bodies; but beſides this, trade operates of itſelf in a

peculiar way upon the mind, and by producing a ſpirit of activity and enterpriſe, and above all engendering the higheſt notions of ſelf-importance and univerſal equality, it ever renders its votaries the moſt meddling and unmanageable part of the community. Such are the evils that undeniably grow up with population, manufactures and commerce; now among the colonies population is yet in its infancy, manufactures are almoſt unknown, and commerce (except ſo far as it reſpects the objects of tillage) is but in a feeble and imperfect ſtate—in other words, the moſt prolific ſeeds of political intrigue and diſquiet, which have grown up to ſuch an amazing height and ſize, and attained to ſuch an extraordinary pitch of luxuriancy in the ſoil of this country, have as yet ſcarcely been planted in that of America. Agriculture, which amidſt its induſtry, frugality, and ſimplicity, has neither time nor inclination to meddle with ſtate affairs, and has ever been found timid and peaceful, conſtitutes almoſt the ſole employment of the Americans, and occupies nearly their whole attention.

But beſides that, the ſame cauſes do not yet operate in America, which have long had a moſt ſenſible influence on the public mind in this country; it does not contain thoſe handles of diſcontent,

diſcontent, which ſedition is ever ready to catch at, in order to diſturb the order of ſociety. The ſtructure of the community does not allow, nor does the conſtitution itſelf, acknowledge any of thoſe honorary titles or gradations of rank, which are the objects of envy and diſſatisfaction to the ambitious and turbulent; but yet are eſſential to our conſtitution, as a mixed monarchy: nor again has time introduced the ſame inequalities into the diſtribution of property, which (though they originate for the moſt part in induſtry) are the common topics of complaint among the poorer claſſes. In ſhort, the political edifice has not as yet been expoſed to thoſe violent ſtorms and hurricanes, which can alone try the ſoundneſs of its ſtructure, and afford any ſatisfactory aſſurance of its ſtability: and it would therefore be little better than madneſs, to pull down an old building, which has hitherto been proof againſt all the inclemencies of the weather, and the ravages of time, in order to erect it anew, after a model ſo little ſanctioned by experience. The author, however, is confident that he may with juſtice go ſtill farther, and aſſert, that the American conſtitution has not only as yet exhibited no adequate pledge of its durability; but that it has already ſhewn ſtrong ſymptoms of internal decay.

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That ſpirit of democratic licentiouſneſs, which prevails in the principal towns of the united ſtates, and which ſhews itſelf in all their public prints, and even tranſpires in the proceedings of the provincial aſſemblies, nay of the Congreſs itſelf, affords a ſtrong preſumption, that the conſtitution does not contain that juſt equilibrium of power, which is eſſential to its welfare, as a mixed government; and may even warrant the ſuſpicion, that that powerful aſcendancy, which it has allotted to the republican intereſt, will in the end either cauſe its diſſolution, or abſorb every function of the ſtate. The authority of the executive power certainly forms no ſufficient counterpoiſe to it; and it may well be doubted, whether that power has not maintained itſelf hitherto, rather by the perſonal abilities and popularity of the individual in whoſe hands it has been placed, than by its own proper ſtrength and vigour. At leaſt, the neceſſity that there ſeems to have been of continuing Waſhington in the preſidentſhip, ſo long beyond the term appointed by the conſtitution, ſtrongly countenances ſuch an opinion; and if it does not afford a well-founded preſumption, that he has been the main ſtay and ſupport of the confederation, certainly proves, that his influence with the ſeveral ſtates has been thought

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neceſſary to cement their union. But as theſe are queſtions, which muſt be determined by the complexion of events that fall under every one's obſervation, and the reader will naturally judge of them entirely by the light in which he himſelf ſees them; the author will content himſelf with having thus generally ſtated the grounds of his own opinion, and with declaring, that the aſpect of public affairs in America, ſo far as he has attended to them, inſtead of weakening, appear in his eye both to ſtrengthen and illuſtrate the maxim laid down above, viz. That a ſyſtem of repreſentation adapted excluſively to the ſupport of the popular intereſt, is perfectly inimical to the genius of a mixed government, and would, if introduced into this country, in all probability prove fatal to our conſtitution.

The above reaſoning is levelled more directly againſt ſuch ſyſtems of reformation, as manifeſtly ſavour of republicaniſm; but it is applicable, in a certain degree, to every plan of reform, that has been laid before the public. The propoſitions of the more moderate reformer, who profeſſes only to reſcue our liberties from the hands of uſurpation, by ſtrengthening that barrier, which he ſays is in danger of being trampled under foot by the exorbitant influence of the Crown, are but the more dangerous as they

they are the more plauſible. The general object of all reformers is, to render the Houſe of Commons more truly and effectually the organ of the people than it now is; they all likewiſe propoſe to accompliſh this object by introducing a greater degree of equality into the ſtate of the repreſentation on the one hand, and by extinguiſhing, as far as poſſible, on the other every ſpecies of undue influence, whether practiſed, in the firſt inſtance, at elections, or finally, in the proceedings of the houſe itſelf. Now what are the particular meaſures recommended with this view by the moſt temperate advocate for reform? So far as the author of theſe remarks is acquainted with them, they may be comprized under the following heads: 1. To aboliſh gradually by purchaſe all thoſe boroughs, which are either entirely at the diſpoſal of particular individuals, or are materially influenced in the nomination of their members by private patronage;—2. to transfer their ſhare of the repreſentation to the counties and manufacturing towns;—3. to allot a ſtill farther acceſſion of influence to the commercial intereſt;—4. to extend and ſimplify the elective franchiſe in reſpect to the qualifications of the electors;—5. to render ſeats in Parliament more acceſſible to men of ſmall fortune, by diminiſhing, as far as poſſible, the expences attendant on

conteſted

conteſted elections; 6. and laſtly, to re-eſtabliſh triennial Parliaments. Before the author proceeds to conſider theſe propoſitions ſingly, he will offer to the reader's conſideration a few obſervations of a more general nature on a ſubject, that ever affords matter of ſucceſsful declamation to the advocates of reform, on account of it's being for the moſt part ſuperficially attended to, and but very imperfectly underſtood.

The ſtate of the repreſentation is a conſtant topic of complaint, and is the main pretence, on which the enemies of the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem maintain the neceſſity of a reformation. Now equality of repreſentation can only be thought eſſential either upon the idea, that the Houſe of Commons is to be conſidered ſimply as a medium, through which the people exerciſe a ſort of perſonal influence in the buſineſs of legiſlation; or becauſe it may be eſteemed as neceſſary, in order to attach it ſufficiently to the cauſe of liberty. If it be thought eſſential on the former footing, it muſt be defended on the pure principle of delegation; as the repreſentative body can in no other way be rendered the organ of it's conſtituents. The Britiſh conſtitution, however, altogether diſclaims any ſuch principle. The Commons are not tied down to the narrow views of their electors, but are bound to follow the ſuggeſtions of their own good

ſenſe and integrity; and our anceſtors, when they endeavoured to concentrate in one aſſembly all the wiſdom and integrity of the country, deſigned, that the country ſhould be governed by it's deciſions, and benefited by it's labours; nor did they ever dream of reducing it to the condition of a mere piece of mechaniſm, or of making it the vehicle of ignorance and ſelf-intereſt. It cannot in ſhort be rationally doubted, but that every Houſe of Commons (whatever may be the mode of it's election,) that is competent to decide upon the true intereſts of the nation, and devoted to it's welfare, is to every uſeful purpoſe an adequate repreſentative, and perfectly comes up to the ends of it's inſtitution.

But, however little this principle of delegation may accord with that enlarged and liberal ſpirit, for which the Britiſh conſtitution is ſo eminently remarkable; it is no leſs contrary to it's genius as a mixed government. The Commons cannot be conſidered as the mere tools of their conſtituents, but upon the moſt democratic principles; nor can ſuch a notion be ſtrongly impreſſed upon the minds of the people without inſpiring them with an almoſt irreſiſtible inclination to arrogate to themſelves the power of actually interfering in the affairs of government. How far the reformers of the preſent

day are actuated by this principle, when they call the Houſe of Commons the mere creature and agent of the people, and complain, that the exerciſe of the elective franchiſe (as if invaluable in itſelf) is renewed only once in ſeven years; or how far their inceſſant appeals to the people themſelves on the ſubject of the repreſentation are calculated to propogate republican notions, the reader muſt judge for himſelf.

If, on the other hand, the neceſſity of equalizing the repreſentation be inſiſted on, merely to eradicate the effects of undue influence, and to attach the Houſe of Commons more effectually to the cauſe of the people; the remedy certainly far exceeds, what the magnitude and extent of the diſeaſe require; and is of much too general and indefinite a nature. The growth of private patronage is the main, if not the only abuſe, that has crept into the ſtate of the repreſentation; the other defects and imperfections (if they are indeed ſuch,) which are enumerated by reformers, have ever exiſted, and are not corruptions, but parts of the conſtitution itſelf. As the evil is therefore of a definite and ſpecific nature, it ought certainly to be removed by a ſpecific law *. No old eſtabliſhed polity can ever

* The undue influence ariſing from private patronage might be amply ſuppreſſed by aboliſhing the more obnoxious

ever be aboliſhed without materially diſturbing the order of ſociety, and weakening, in proportion, the bonds of civil obedience. Every plan of reform, that goes beyond the evil, which it is deſigned to redreſs, is therefore ſo far pernicious; and a general ſyſtem of innovation, whatever may be it's intrinſic merits, can never be juſtified but by the moſt extreme neceſſity.

The author, however, conceives that the propoſitions above-mentioned not only much exceed the point of juſt and ſalutary reformation; but that they are ſtill more objectionable on account of their own peculiar tendency. Each is evidently calculated to throw an additional weight into the popular ſcale; and the whole together would probably give the conſtitution ſuch a biaſs towards democracy, as totally to deſtroy that equilibrium of power, which is it's only ſecurity.

The three firſt, ſo far as they are deſigned to diminiſh the influence of the landed intereſt, and to increaſe that of the commercial, would manifeſtly operate in this way. The genius of commerce is naturally of a republican complexion, and has ever infuſed democratic principles into her votaries. Of this truth a tran-

boroughs, and transferring their ſhare of the repreſentation to the counties.

And this mode of redreſs would alſo ſerve to diſtribute the onus of private buſineſs more equally among the members of the Houſe of Commons.

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ſient view of the ſeveral commercial ſtates, that have exiſted in the world, may ſufficiently convince the reader*; and the political creed of the merchants and manufacturers of this country certainly affords no exception to the general rule. Whatever degree of republicaniſm may ſubſiſt among us, it ſeems to be confined almoſt excluſively to that body†, at leaſt it extends not far beyond the ſphere of it's immediate influence, and may be fairly conſidered as emanating from it, as it's centre. In what way commerce produces this effect upon the human

* Hume in his fifteenth eſſay remarks, that, "it has become an eſtabliſhed opinion, that commerce can never flouriſh, but in a free government: if we trace commerce, ſays he, in it's progreſs, through Tyre, Athens, Syracuſe, Carthage, Venice, Florence, Genoa, Antwerp, Holland, England, &c. we ſhall always find it to have fixed it's ſeat in free governments."

The propoſition may be reverſed; and it may be aſſerted with equal truth, that ſo far as commerce gains admittance into any country, ſo far will it ever diffuſe a ſpirit of freedom and independance. Trade naturally places all that are engaged in it, upon a footing of equality; and the commercial world, ſo far as it extends, conſtitutes a ſort of perfect democracy.

† The political tenets of the majority of thoſe, who diſſent from the eſtabliſhed church, certainly preſent an exception to this aſſertion. As this claſs of the community is however virtually excluded by the teſt-laws out of the repreſentative body, it may be overlooked in the preſent queſtion.

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mind, might probably be explained without much difficulty; but it is the fact only that the author is at preſent concerned with; and this being amply evinced by the evidence of hiſtory and experience, he thinks he can run little danger in laying it down as a maxim, that, ſhould the commercial influence ever gain an abſolute aſcendancy in the Houſe of Commons, it would almoſt infallibly ſubvert that mixed government, which has been ſo long the happineſs and glory of this nation*. On this account, the propriety of

* In what the author here advances with reſpect to the influence of commerce on the political opinions of mankind, he is very far from deſigning to throw an odium upon either the merchants or manufacturers of this country. As he knows too well, how largely they contribute to the ſupport of the national burthens, not to wiſh them every encouragement and ſucceſs; ſo he conceives that thoſe very notions, which he imputes to them as a body on the ſubject of Government, ſo far as they ſpring from an honeſt conviction, and are not the mere off-spring of a turbulent and ſeditious diſpoſition, reflect rather honour than diſgrace upon them. In truth their chief fault lies in their being founded on ſentiments too favourable to human nature, and aiming rather at ſpeculative than practical perfection; in attributing too much influence to true wiſdom and public virtue, and too little to ignorance and ſelf-intereſt. Was mankind indeed of this ſtamp, as there would in effect be little occaſion for government at all, ſo democracy (wherever the ſize of the community would admit of it,) would be, at leaſt, as rational a form

of allotting a greater portion of members to the commercial and manufacturing towns, does not reſt ſolely upon the expediency of equalizing the repreſentation; but the queſtion is of ſtill more moment, as it reſpects the introduction of a new power into the legiſlature.

Both juſtice and ſound policy demand, without doubt, that the trading part of the community ſhould poſſeſs it's proper advocates in the national repreſentative; but, can any one rationally doubt of it's having been hitherto ſufficiently repreſented, who reflects at all upon the flouriſhing condition, at which our commerce and manufactures have actually arrived, or gives a moment's attention to the unbounded encouragement, that they have uniformly received from the legiſlature itſelf?

Several of our large trading towns, do not, it is true, poſſeſs the expreſs privilege of delegating members to Parliament (a privilege, by the way, incompatible with the genius of the

a form as any other. But as the truth, alaſs! lies far on the other ſide; ſurely no form of Government, that has been found able to manage the unruly paſſions of men, without any oppreſſive reſtraints on natural liberty, ought to be given up in favour of viſionary perfection; and under this idea, the author is ſatisfied, that the experienced excellence of the Britiſh Conſtitution fully warrants the caution, which he has ſuggeſted above.

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conſtitution, ſo far as it implies an excluſive appropriation of particular members to particular places,) but they virtually enjoy, beyond all doubt, an ample ſhare in the national repreſentation, as well through the operation of that extenſive influence, which they poſſeſs in the country, as by means of that right of ſuffrage, which they, formally, poſſeſs in common with others at the county elections. It may well indeed be doubted, whether the privilege inqueſtion would, not in effect be injurious rather than beneficial to that very body, in whoſe behalf it is demanded. As it has hitherto uniformly experienced the moſt effectual protection under the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem, it is certainly hard to conceive, what uſeful purpoſe ſuch a change could anſwer; and, when it is conſidered, what ſcenes of diſorder, drunkenneſs, and diſſipation are ever occaſioned by public elections, it ſhould ſeem, that the manufacturers of this country ought much rather to deprecate, than ſolicit a privilege, that would contribute ſo eminently to increaſe that ſpirit of idleneſs and licentiouſneſs, of which they have but too often to lament the effects.

As to the alterations propoſed in the ſtate of the elective franchiſe, with reſpect to the qualifications of the electors; ſo far as they are de-

ſigned to remove that obſcurity and uncertainty in which the right of voting is ſaid to be involved, and which, it is complained, are become a ſource of infinite confuſion, litigation, and expence, they would certainly have deſerved commendation had they been fitted to attain their object. Every well wiſher to his country muſt certainly regret, that the exerciſe of ſo important a privilege, ſhould be in any reſpect, ill-aſcertained, or productive of thoſe vexatious diſputes, which it undoubtedly gives birth to: but, as it is impoſſible in the nature of the thing, to clear it of all difficulty and uncertainty, ſo the ſeveral ſtandards that have been ſuggeſted by different reformers, are in general, plainly inſufficient to remedy the evil complained of. They are indeed, almoſt without exception, of ſo vague and indefinite a nature, that they are rather calculated to occaſion ſtill greater confuſion and embarraſſment, than to introduce certainty or preciſion; and inſtead of contributing to eſtabliſh order and decorum at the polls, they would, (if adopted) in all probability, ſerve only, more or leſs, to make them the ſcenes of ſtill greater turbulence and diſorder.

So far as the changes propoſed are intended to render the qualifications of the electors more

comprehenſive, and to extend the right of ſuffrage; their obvious tendency is to give the conſtitution a greater bias towards republicaniſm; whether we conſider them as ſetting aſide the operation of the teſt laws, or as communicating the elective franchiſe to the lower claſſes of the ſtate. Every day's experience ſerves but to ſhew more inconteſtibly, that that claſs of men, which is affected by thoſe laws, is, as a body, but little favourable to the monarchical part of our conſtitution; and ever inclined to abridge the prerogatives of the crown. As to the admiſſion of the poorer claſſes to the right of voting, beſides contributing directly to increaſe the weight of the democratic ſcale, it would probably have a much worſe effect, by engendering a ſpirit of intrigue and licentiouſneſs. The common people are little able to diſtinguiſh accurately between the right of chooſing repreſentatives, and that of exerciſing a perſonal influence in the direction of affairs; nor could they, it is to be feared, be put in poſſeſſion of the former, without being too forcibly tempted to uſurp the latter alſo.

But for what purpoſe hazard ſo important an innovation? If it be intended by it, to ſecure the freedom of elections, (and there ſeems to be no other honeſt or rational end to be anſwered

ſwered by it) ſurely, no ſuch effect can be reaſonably expected from it. Muſt we go to poverty to ſeek for independence; or will ignorance be found leaſt ſubject to illuſion? The change might perhaps overturn that ſyſtem of private patronage, by which ſome individuals of large property have acquired an aſcendancy in particular boroughs, and would probably place all men of equal fortune and addreſs nearly upon a par; but ſo far from tending to enſure to public virtue and enlightened patriotiſm, their juſt influence on the minds of the electors themſelves; it is evidently rather calculated to enlarge the ſcope of bribery and intrigue, and to eſtabliſh the dominion of error and ſelf-intereſt. For as it is not reaſonable to expect, that men, who are deſtitute of all the advantages of education, and perfectly unacquainted with the true principles of the government under which they live, ſhould have any fixed political principles to act upon, much leſs be competent to decide upon the pretenſions of different candidates; ſo we may fairly preſume, that their dependent ſituation in life, would infallibly lead them to convert the right of ſuffrage into an inſtrument of preſent emolument. This is certainly the language of common ſenſe; nor can any one doubt, but it is alſo the

language of experience, who is not a perfect ſtranger to the methods actually practiſed, and that too with ſucceſs, at every conteſted election. Does not wealth, or cabal, in fact, prevail upon every occaſion, where poverty aſſiſts the views of artifice and corruption? And would not the candidate who ſhould diſdain to recommend himſelf by any thing but his own intrinſic merits, be the object of deriſion and contempt, inſtead of receiving that attention and applauſe, which his integrity and patriotiſm might entitle him to? If this be the true ſtate of the caſe, the meaſure under conſideration would, beyond all queſtion, tend to increaſe, rather than eradicate the practice of undue influence; and therefore, plainly contribute to render ſeats in parliament more inacceſſible than ever to men of ſmall fortunes; ſo much ſo indeed, that it may well be doubted, whether any regulations that could be adopted, for diminiſhing the expences of *polling*, would be ſo far ſufficient to counteract its operation, as to produce any ſenſible effect. But on this topic the author will content himſelf with making this ſingle remark; that ſo far as the eſtabliſhed mode of conducting elections, tends to confine ſeats in the houſe of commons to men of independent fortunes, and liberal education,

it is, in its effects at leaſt, plainly beneficial; and, however deſirable an object it may be in itſelf, to remove every inconvenience that the electors may be expoſed to, and every expence, to which the candidate may be at preſent ſubjected, yet ſuch innovations, as are calculated to grant too eaſy an admiſſion into the repreſentative body, have a direct tendency to undermine it's reſpectability; and inſtead of contributing to promote the intereſts of real liberty, to make it the prey of ignorance and venality.

Upon the ſubject of the laſt propoſition, for abridging the duration of parliament, the author will be very brief. The chief object, that is propoſed to be attained by this meaſure, ſeems to be the reduction of that influence, which the crown and ariſtocracy at preſent exerciſe at elections; and ſo far as that influence reſts upon the practice of direct bribery, it would certainly be, in a great degree, effectual, by rendering the expence too great for the purſe either of the king, or any private individual; but whatever obſtacles it might throw in the way of particular intereſts, it certainly could not operate in the ſame way upon the public at large, or univerſally ſtop the ſource of corruption; but would rather tend to encourage and aggravate the practice complained of,

(and

(and no one can be more diſpoſed to reprobate it than the author himſelf,) by affording more frequent occaſions of exerting it. Whether, therefore, the two higher branches of the legiſlature have, or have not, attained too great an aſcendancy in the political ſcale, (and it certainly may at leaſt be queſtioned,) the remedy is certainly ill-choſen, and fitted rather to ſap, than ſtrengthen, the foundation of public virtue.

But the meaſure in queſtion is ſtill further objectionable on another account. If it produce any effect at all upon the ſtate of the repreſentation, it muſt plainly be by continually changing the members of the houſe of commons; now, how injurious ſuch a frequent introduction of new members into the national counſels would prove to the tranſaction of public buſineſs, it muſt be needleſs to inſiſt.

With reſpect to the influence of the propoſed alteration on the kingdom at large; as public elections obviouſly contribute to produce a ſpirit of licentiouſneſs and intrigue in the minds of the people, and afford the moſt favourable opportunity that ſedition itſelf can wiſh for, to diſturb the order of ſociety, common ſenſe muſt ſuggeſt, that a frequent repetition of them cannot but be pernicious; and experience, in effect,

has

has directly contradicted that favorite maxim, —that frequent and new parliaments, tend to the happy union, and good agreement between the king and people. Triennial Parliaments were found by our anceſtors, to be, in fact, productive only of diſquiet, and fatal to the national tranquillity. The term was therefore, by 1 G. I. St. 2. C. 38. prolonged to ſeven years, expreſsly for the purpoſe of preventing thoſe violent heats and animoſities, which they were found to occaſion, and for the peace and ſecurity of the Government.

XII. The ſubſtance of what the author has endeavoured to demonſtrate is ſimply this, that the true ſpirit of the Conſtitution, and the public welfare require, that the executive power and the peerage ſhould poſſeſs an influence in the Houſe of Commons, powerful enough to defend their rights effectually in that Aſſembly againſt the attacks of Democracy; and of conſequence, that the propoſitions recommended by modern reforms, being either plainly or avowedly calculated to extinguiſh that influence, ought to be zealouſly oppoſed and rejected by every wellwiſher to his country, as ſubverſive of the eſtabliſhed government, and eminently prejudicial to the Community at large.

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He is not indeed hardy enough to deny, that any abuſes whatſoever have crept into the ſtate of the repreſentation; but he thinks, that the arguments, which he has alledged, may ſuffice to convince the reader, that thoſe abuſes, whatever they are, can but be of a partial and ſubordinate nature, and might therefore be remedied by definite and ſpecific laws much more properly and effectually, than by any general ſyſtem of innovation. And he further heſitates not to declare, that, however they may in themſelves, or on account of their probable conſequences, demand redreſs, yet ſo far as they have hitherto operated only to diminiſh the weight of the Republican part of our Conſtitution, they can, in his opinion, excite but little well-founded alarm for freedom in the breaſt of any one.

That the influence of the two higher branches of the legiſlature in the repreſentative body has been, in ſome reſpects, directly increaſed ſince the era of the Revolution, cannot certainly be denied: but it is alſo certain, that many cauſes have contributed ſo far to augment the weight of the oppoſite ſcale, as to render ſuch an increaſe not only ſalutary, but neceſſary, to preſerve the balance of the Conſtitution.

" All human affairs, (ſays Hume, when

" arguing

" arguing on the ſide of thoſe, who maintained
" in his time, that the biaſs of the Conſtitution
" leaned towards a republic,) are entirely go-
" verned by *opinion*. Now there has been a
" very ſudden, and a very ſenſible change in
" the opinions of men within theſe laſt fifty
" years, by the progreſs of learning and of
" liberty. Moſt people, in this iſland, have
" diveſted themſelves of all ſuperſtitious rever-
" ence to names and authorities. The clergy
" have much loſt their credit: their preten-
" ſions and doctrines have been ridiculed; and
" even religion can ſcarce ſupport itſelf in the
" world. The mere name of king commands
" little reſpect; and to talk of a king as God's
" vicegerent upon earth, or to give him any of
" thoſe magnificent titles, which formerly
" dazzled mankind, would but excite laughter
" in every one.

" Had men (he afterwards adds) been in the
" ſame diſpoſition at the revolution, as they
" are at preſent, monarchy would have run a
" great riſk of being entirely loſt in this
" iſland."

Such were the changes, that fifty years had produced at the time, when Hume wrote this Eſſay, and ſuch the language, that might then have been held by thoſe, who aſſerted, that the

balance of the Conſtitution inclined towards democracy. Another term of fifty years has now elapſed; and how much more forcibly may the ſame argument be now urged!

The inhabitants of this iſland have been taught to diveſt themſelves not only of all ſuperſtitious reverence, but of all ſober and rational reſpect, for names and authorities; and, were they led away by the favorite political doctrines of the day, would loſe all ſenſe of juſt and neceſſary ſubordination. They are inſtructed to believe, that the people are the ſole reſidence of Majeſty, and the only ſource of all legitimate power; and of conſequence, that every authority, that does not originate in their expreſs appointment or conſent, is uſurpation and tyranny: that the people are alſo competent to decide upon the conduct of all public affairs; and have a right to remove and puniſh their agents, whenever they may conceive them to have abuſed their truſt.

Such are the topics, not unuſually, inſiſted upon by our modern advocates for liberty, and ſuch the complexion of our faſhionable political principles. They may perhaps be ſomewhat plauſible in theory, and they are undoubtedly well calculated to gain numberleſs converts; but they are, beyond all queſtion, falſe in fact,

and

and in their conſequences moſt pernicious to the tranquillity of ſociety.

The people but too ready to countenance, and ſupport pretenſions, by which they are ſo much flattered, are in haſte to put on their new character of judges, and to exerciſe their inquiſitorial function. All public tranſactions are canvaſſed and ſcrutinized with the moſt jealous ſeverity: each individual condemns or approves as intereſt, paſſion, or prejudice, leads him; and, as much more ſagacity is diſcovered by detecting error or diſhoneſty, than by ſimply commending, what another is the author of, though the meaſures of adminiſtration may receive an ample ſhare of panegyric, yet they are naturally loaded with a much greater of obloquy. The buſy demagogue ſees in each the moſt inſidious deſigns; the miniſter is arraigned, as plotting the utter ſubverſion of our liberties; and the people at large are excited by the moſt inflammatory repreſentations to repel the attack by open violence.

Some good, no doubt, ariſes out of ſuch a ſtate of things: before ſuch a tribunal deſpotiſm will certainly ſhrink back, and hide it's head; nor can the terror of it's deciſions fail to inſpire every public functionary with caution, and even, in ſome ſort, with integrity. But it

is, at the ſame time, obvious to remark, that, when ſuch a ſpirit pervades all ranks, a government, like our's, muſt be virtually democratical, if the repreſentative body be the mere vehicle of public opinion, and cannot fail eventually to degenerate into an actual republic, if the balance of the Conſtitution be not maintained, by allotting to the other members of the legiſlature an additional influence in that body.

So far therefore as the changes which have taken place in the repreſentation, have operated only in this way, they cannot, in their effect at leaſt, be conſidered as pernicious by any one, who is a real friend to our mixed government; nor can the temperate and ſober reformer, conſiſtently with his profeſſions, differ from the friend of the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem, but as he conceives thoſe changes to have operated too far.

The queſtion then, at which they are at iſſue, cannot be, whether the influence poſſeſſed by the crown and ariſtocracy in the Houſe of Commons, is or is not in itſelf, pernicious: but, whether it is, in *degree*, dangerous and alarming—or in other words, whether the king and peers have acquired ſuch an aſcendancy in the national counſels, as to be able to carry meaſures, plainly ſubverſive of the liberties of the people,

people, or injurious to their intereſt? Now this is obviouſly a queſtion of fact, and not of abſtract reaſoning; and therefore ought to be determined ſolely by the evidence of experience. Without indulging them in idle ſpeculations, the judicious enquirer will refer himſelf wholly to the teſtimony of hiſtory; and, inſtead of liſtening to empaſſioned declamation or pathetic complaints on the ſubject of undue influence, will attend excluſively to public tranſactions themſelves, and be guided by the light, in which they have ſucceſſively offered themſelves to his own obſervation. It is no part of the author's plan to enter into a minute retroſpect of our political hiſtory for ſome years back, nor is he willing to biaſs his reader by general aſſertions. As he has now therefore laid before him ſuch conſiderations, as appear to his mind to demonſtrate the excellency of the preſent Conſtitution of the repreſentative body, and called in the evidence of paſt experience in general in ſupport of his opinion, he ſhould here naturally conclude his work, leaving his reader to decide entirely for himſelf upon facts of a more recent date. He cannot however refrain from offering a ſhort comment upon the conduct purſued in this reſpect by the author of a late publication, (that gave occaſion to theſe

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Conſiderations;) and alſo upon the poſitions, which he there obtrudes upon his reader: as the former appear to him moſt extraordinary and unwarrantable, and the latter falſe and unfounded in fact.

Mr. Wyvill's propoſitions comprize two objects of no leſs moment, than the total extermination of that influence, which the crown and ariſtocracy have always hitherto poſſeſſed (in ſome degree at leaſt,) in the Houſe of Commons; and the introduction of a new plan of repreſentation, not only eſſentially different from the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem, but in many reſpects (if what has been advanced above, be juſt,) incompatible with our mixed government. Now the author, who urges ſuch important innovations, as theſe, upon his countrymen, ought ſurely, in the firſt inſtance, clearly to demonſtrate the exiſtence of the evil complained of; and laſtly to ſhew the ſufficiency and virtue of the remedy, which he propoſes, by fully and diſtinctly ſtating the manner in which it is intended to operate. But on neither of theſe heads has Mr. Wyvill condeſcended to ſatisfy ſuch of his readers, as may be diſpoſed to diſpute either the excellency of his project, or the neceſſity itſelf of a general reform. He affects indeed, to think both ſo incontro-

vertible

vertible as to need no proof or illuſtration; and therefore, whenever he ſpeaks of his own plan, he calls it, without ceremony, a *great ſyſtematic improvement*; and inſtead of opening his work with a copious ſurvey of our political hiſtory, in order to evince the neceſſity of a parliamentary regeneration, as if afraid of inſulting the good ſenſe of his reader by dwelling upon ſo ſelf-evident a propoſition, he contents himſelf with barely referring him to the ſingle inſtance of the American war, as fully deciſive, without the aid of any other argument of the point in queſtion. In like manner, when he comes to conſider certain objections that might be urged againſt his propoſitions, inſtead of vouchſafing to give a ſerious reply to thoſe who object to any ſuch extenſive alteration, under the idea, that the people already poſſeſs an adequate influence in the Houſe of Commons, he treats the objection with deriſion, and tells his reader, that his patience ſhall not be wearied by refuting palpable abſurdities *. But ſurely general aſſertions like theſe,

* It muſt be confeſſed, that the objection, as ſtated by Mr. Wyvill, deſerves not much conſideration. "Should the pen-"ſioned advocate," ſays he, "of the preſent ſyſtem of "abuſes,

theſe, if they are addreſſed to men of no education; who have but little knowledge of the ſtructure of our legiſlature, and have neither time nor capacity, to examine minutely into any propoſed ſyſtem of reform, are inſidious and unjuſtifiable: if, on the other hand, they are addreſſed to men of ability and information, they are rather calculated to prejudice, than promote the cauſe of the author. In conſideration therefore, of ſuch readers, he would certainly have better

" abuſes, contend, that a parliament, over which the peo-
" ple have little regular influence,—is beſt calculated to
" obtain the great purpoſe of the conſtitution, viz. the
" happineſs of the people; the reader's patience ſhall not
" be wearied, &c."

Opponents of this deſcription, are certainly but little entitled to a ſerious anſwer. But Mr. Wyvill cannot be ignorant, that there are many, who think a reform of parliament unneceſſary, not becauſe they maintain, that the people ought to poſſeſs but little influence in the repreſentative aſſembly, but becauſe they are convinced, that the people are already amply repreſented. If therefore, he meant his anſwer to be applied generally to all, who defend the preſent ſtate of the repreſentation, as without doubt he did, beſides being bound in candour to treat the objection with greater liberality, he ought in reaſon to have proved by the evidence of facts, that the degree of influence, which the people now enjoy in the legiſlature, is actually inadequate to the preſervation of their rights and liberties.

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conſulted the ſucceſs of his own views, (at he would have acted more fairly by all his readers,) had he diſtinctly laid before them ſome of that evidence, which carries, it ſhould ſeem, ſuch abundant conviction to his own breaſt.

It may however be doubted, whether he himſelf ever thoroughly weighed the nature and tendency of his own propoſitions; and as to his aſſertion, that the people of England have but little regular influence over the Houſe of Commons, as it is now conſtituted, there is ſome reaſon to ſuſpect, that he did not ſo much decline the taſk of proving it, becauſe he thought it ſuperfluous, as becauſe he found it too difficult. At leaſt, if what has been urged above againſt the projects of modern reformers, be well founded, the plan recommended by him could not be carried into execution, in its full extent, without undermining the very foundations of that mixed government, of which he profeſſes himſelf the friend: and with reſpect to his aſſertion, ſtated above, it is ſurely very extraordinary, that, in replying to thoſe who are of a contrary opinion, he ſhould affect ſo much tenderneſs for his reader's patience, when, at the ſame time, he abuſes it without fear or ceremony, by anſwering objections compara-

tively inſignificant, with the moſt profuſe attention.

This circumſtance, if it does not go to impeach his ſincerity, may juſtly lead the reader to ſuſpect the ſoundneſs of his poſition: and the fact, which he adduces in proof of it, as being in a peculiar manner, deciſive, would probably, if fairly examined, rather countenance, than invalidate ſuch a ſuſpicion. There are few, but muſt have remarked in various inſtances, with what ſolicitude and addreſs the members of the houſe of commons ſound the opinion of the nation on the ſubject of public tranſactions; how ſtudiouſly all unpopular and offenſive meaſures are avoided by government; and with what exultation the approbation and applauſe of the country are appealed to by all parties. Every ſuch inſtance certainly evinces the influence of the people over the national counſels, and proves that there exiſt a moſt intimate connection and intercourſe between the repreſentative body and its conſtituents;—nor did this connection, perhaps, ever ſhew itſelf more clearly than during the American war. That war, however imprudently entered into by miniſters, however ill-conducted, and however obſtinately perſevered in by them againſt the true intereſts of the country, was certainly

certainly undertaken with the moſt unequivocal approbation of the public, long proſecuted with its manifeſt acquieſcence, and finally, after having become burthenſome and unpopular, brought to a concluſion through its influence. The ſentiments and demeanour of the commons were but the counterpart of thoſe exhibited by the nation at large.

At the commencement of the war, the miniſter received a powerful and brilliant ſupport; as the general deluſion and the proſpect of ſucceſs abated, his cauſe was gradually deſerted; and laſtly, after it became decidedly unpopular, the whole weight of court influence was inſufficient to procure him a majority. It muſt be confeſſed, that the war with our colonies conſiderably outlived the approbation of the public; but this circumſtance can never afford ſufficient ground for thoſe unbounded charges of venality and corruption, which it is now ſo much the faſhion to throw out againſt the majority of the houſe of commons; nor will it have any weight with thoſe, who had rather ſee the operations of the legiſlature directed with ſteadineſs and conſiſtency, though in ſome inſtances approaching to obſtinacy, than have them left to the guidance of a wild

democratic aſſembly, and driven at the mercy of every guſt of popular opinion.

So long as the houſe of commons is compoſed of men, both qualified to decide upon the true intereſts of the country, and diſpoſed to defend them, it is obviouſly calculated, as far as it can be, to fulfil the ends of it's inſtitution.

Now in neither of theſe particulars will it probably appear to the impartial enquirer to have been hitherto defective. On the ſcore of ability, indeed, it has never been impeached: but neither can it's attachment to the cauſe of liberty and the national welfare be called in queſtion with more juſtice. The caſe of the American war certainly affords no good ground for the contrary opinion: the gradual ſeceſſion of the miniſter's partizans toward the cloſe of that war, may with more propriety be alledged as a proof of the independence and patriotiſm of Parliament; and that ſingular correſpondence of ſentiment, which, as has been remarked, diſcovered itſelf, during it's progreſs, between the nation and it's repreſentative, certainly affords one of the moſt ſatisfactory arguments, that can be deviſed in favour of the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem of repreſentation.

But to conclude, as it is unreaſonable to ſuppoſe,

poſe, that men, whoſe circumſtances place them without the reach of want, and whoſe rank and education naturally produce a high ſenſe of honour, ſhould ever be ſo far influenced by venal conſiderations, or ſo far ceaſe to be moral agents, as to ſubmit themſelves implicitly to the arbitrary guidance of any leader; we may reſt aſſured, that, ſo long as the members of the Houſe of Commons continue to be of that deſcription, our liberties cannot be placed in better or ſafer hands. They will then only be in danger, when want, ignorance, and venality, ſhall take the place of affluence, capacity, and reſpectability; and ſhould any change in the ſtate of the elective franchiſe ever fill the Houſe with men of ſhattered fortunes and diſſolute characters, it is eaſy to foreſee that our Conſtitution and liberties would not long ſurvive the change.

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